THE BOOK WAS DRENCHED

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY
OU_166858
UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 811.08 / R16M Accession No. 33217

Author Rajan, B.

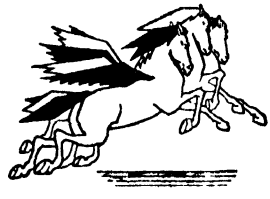
Title Modern American Poetry. 1950.

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

EDITED BY B. RAJAN

FREDERICK BRANTLEY
DAVID DAICHES
VIVIENNE KOCH
JAMES LAUGHLIN
ROBERT LOWELL
ARCHIBALD MACLEISH
NORMAN MACLEOD
LOUIS L. MARTZ
MARIANNE MOORE
EZRA POUND
B. RAJAN
THEODORE SPENCER
WALLACE STEVENS
JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA
ROBERT PENN WARREN
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
YVOR WINTERS



London: Dennis Dobson Ltd

First published in Great Britain in 1950 by Dennis Dobson Ltd, 12 Park Place, St James's, London S W 1. All rights reserved. Printed in Great Britain by The Bowering Press, London and Plymouth

123–R

CONTENTS

FOREWORD 7

SYMPOSIUM: MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

The Poetry of Allen Tate — *Vivienne Koch* 9
The Poetry of John Crowe Ransom — *Vivienne Koch* 33
The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren — *Frederick Brantley* 66
Imagism: a Reconsideration — *B. Rajan* 81
The World of Wallace Stevens — *Louis L. Martz* 94
Some Notes on Contemporary American Poetry — *David Daiches* 109
Observations on the Poetry of E. E. Cummings — *Theodore Spencer* 118

A LITTLE ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY

Edited by VIVIENNE KOCH

Go West Young Man — *James Laughlin* 127
The Hairs of My Grandfather's Head — *James Laughlin* 128
The Return of Love — *James Laughlin* 129
Christmas Eve under Hooker's Statue — *Robert Lowell* 130
In the Cage — *Robert Lowell* 131
The Dead in Europe — *Robert Lowell* 132
The Soldier — *Robert Lowell* 132
What Must — *Archibald Macleish* 133
The Dark Descent — *Norman Macleod* 135
A Man in Midpassage — *Norman Macleod* 135
Three Hawks, Three Ladies — *Norman Macleod* 136
Postdate Pacific — *Norman Macleod* 137
The Blue Bomber — *Norman Macleod* 137

Voracities and Verities Sometimes are Interacting *Marianne Moore* 138
From *Canto lxxx* *Ezra Pound* 139
For the Chinese Actress, Gardenia Chang *Kenneth Rexroth* 148
To Wei Pa, a Retired Scholar *Kenneth Rexroth* 148
Credences of Summer *Wallace Stevens* 149
Imago *Wallace Stevens* 154
Celle qui Fût Héaulmiette *Wallace Stevens* 155
St. John and the Back-Ache *Wallace Stevens* 156
Two Conceits *Allen Tate* 157
Five Poems *José Garcia Villa* 159
A Song for Rosemarie *José Garcia Villa* 162
From *Proud Flesh* *Robert Penn Warren* 163
Perpetuum Mobile: the City *William Carlos Williams* 167
The Pink Church *William Carlos Williams* 173
The Sea Farer *William Carlos Williams* 177
The Sound of Waves *William Carlos Williams* 178
To the Holy Spirit *Yvor Winters* 179
Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight *Yvor Winters* 180
American and English Poetry: A Questionnaire 182

FOREWORD

WHEN *Focus* was first planned it was among our early intentions to devote a whole volume to modern American poetry. We wanted to do so because we thought the subject worth discussing; but we were surprised to discover that it had hardly been discussed. The result is that this number of *Focus* is the first book on its subject to be published in England and, apart from Horace Gregory's recent 'History', almost the first of its kind to appear in America. This is not the first time *Focus* has played the pioneer and we should hardly be editorially human if we did not take some pride in making this announcement. But that pride is more than offset by regret at the state of criticism which makes the announcement possible.

This issue of *Focus* is not meant to be a handbook or a survey. It is based on separate studies of five writers whom we think many critics would include among the six most important of contemporary American poets. The sixth should be William Carlos Williams and we are very sorry indeed to be unable to include a study of his work here. Naturally these studies suggest several qualities of modern American verse—they perhaps do so more efficiently than some more comprehensive histories and handbooks—but no isolation of the 'American' element in these poets is intended and we should regard such abstractions as treacherous if not impossible.

It is regrettable to have to add that the poems which should be studied in conjunction with these articles are, many of them, inaccessible in England. Eyre and Spottiswoode have served American poetry well by publishing the collected poems of Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom. But though a collection of Stevens has long been announced the promise shows no signs of being honoured. Meanwhile Cummings and Williams also remain uncollected. In the absence of these essential books we have tried to make the essays intelligible by full quotation from each poet's writings. But we very much hope that this issue of *Focus* will encourage publication of the poets who are discussed in it.

The anthology we include is designed to offset to some small

extent this scarcity of American poetry in England. Similar little anthologies have been published in such magazines as *Twentieth Century Verse*, *Horizon* and *Transformation* and a large selection is available in Oscar Williams's *Little Treasury of Modern Poetry*. To the best of our knowledge, however, no poem in the present anthology has been previously published in England. With two exceptions all the poems included were written during the last three years.

We should like to thank all the authors of the poems which appear here and all the periodicals from whom we have reprinted poetry for their most generous co-operation in making this anthology possible. The quotations in Professor Martz's article are printed by kind permission of Alfred A. Knopf, those in Theodore Spencer's by kind permission of Henry Holt, and those in Miss Koch's essays by kind permission of Messrs Eyre & Spottiswoode. Theodore Spencer's article is a slightly expanded version of an article first published in *The Harvard Wake* and Louis L. Martz's essay includes some paragraphs from an earlier study of Stevens which he published in the *Yale Poetry Review*.

SYMPOSIUM: MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

THE POETRY OF ALLEN TATE

VIVIENNE KOCH

I

I wish to begin by asserting two somewhat bold notions about the poetry of Allen Tate. They may come as a shock to Mr Tate; they will undoubtedly shock some of his best friends and admirers. First of all, it has long become increasingly evident with each new work that Tate is a fugitive from the Fugitives. The Fugitives, that talented group of Southern writers, had in the early twenties found the Northern poetic climate too exacerbatingly chilly and modern, and had reaffirmed their allegiances with 'tradition', a term they took some care to define. This association while formally discontinued in 1925, when their publication, *The Fugitive*, ceased, nevertheless continued because of the group's practice of the 'Zietieren' technique, and also because of their subsequent reunion in other rough political alliances such as the short-lived agrarianism of the thirties led by Herbert Agar, John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate. These persistent social connections, reinforced in the thirties by the briefly published but distinguished *Southern Review*, edited by several of the old Fugitives along with some newer disciples, as well as by the publication of the still-flourishing *Kenyon Review* under the editorship of John Crowe Ransom, was recently (1945) reaffirmed by the renascence of the shabby-genteel *The Sewanee Review* under the vigorous and distinctive editorship of Allen Tate.[1] Nevertheless, while we commonly think of these Southerners as a group, and while in a loose personal sense this may be so, it seems to me that Tate has been trying in a veiled but not altogether deceptive fashion to free himself from the claims of such group loyalty, claims which had at one time threatened the temper of his own sensibility. For Tate had, with an artistic humility strangely discordant with his critical arrogance, at various times in the past publicly avowed

[1] As of the Autumn, 1946 issue, John Palmer succeeded to the editorship.

his apprenticeship to his Southern master, John Crowe Ransom, and to his European one, T. S. Eliot. These poet-critics were the *maîtres* of the Southern group and a common devotion created additional pressures for orthodoxy.

Curiously enough, Tate's first symptomatic departure from his 'tradition' came in what would seem, on the surface, to be the apotheosis of his conformity to it. It came in his translation of *Pervigilium Veneris* (1943), that neglected little classic, never happily Englished, upon which he chose to exercise his powers, not so much as a Latinist, but as a poet of classical affiliations. Yet I think his choice of this delicately tinted but uninnocently erotic poem was perhaps motivated by the fact that, as Professor Mackail points out, it represents

> the first clear note of the new romanticism which transformed classical into medieval literature. . . . Nothing could be less like either a folk-song or an official ode. It touches the last refinement of simplicity. In the delicately running, softly-swaying verses, that ring and glitter and return on themselves in interlacing patterns, there is germinally the essence and inner spirit of the whole romantic movement. All the motives of the old classical poetry survive, yet all have undergone a new birth.

The *Pervigilium Veneris* is Allen Tate's valedictory, from a safe distance, to the Fugitives, to the South, to the 'classical' tradition, to his masters. The quickest way to get the good-byes over with is to say them in a strange language.

My second revision of Tate's customary classification as poet flows from the historic process I have just described, is engendered by it, and is, at the same time, and paradoxically, anterior to the whole development. It is that Tate is a poet of romantic sensibility who has tried with varying degrees of success to compress his talents into a classical mould (I am using the loose terms 'romanticism' and 'classicism' with the hope that their usage in this paper will give them some temporary contextual precision) and that, in inverse degree to his ability or willingness to do so, his best poetry has been written. Where his romanticism gets the better of him or, to shift the metaphor, finds the classicist nodding, there we get the most enduring, vital and original poetry Tate is capable of writing. The *Pervigilium* was playing Romanticism with the rules; with the publication of *The Winter Sea* (1944) it became clear that Tate was playing his own way.

In short, we have been assessing Tate too long in terms of his origins (the genetic fallacy), and his prose judgement (the doctrinal fallacy). It is time we began to follow the lead of the poems.

II

In the *Selected Poems* (1937) representing poems from as early as 1922, it is possible to group together the poems of the early twenties on several grounds: 'Obituary', 'Death of Little Boys', 'Horation Epode to the Duchess of Malfi', 'The Subway', 'Ditty', 'Retroduction to American History', 'Mr Pope', all bear alike the imprint of the Eliot of 'Prufrock' (via Laforgue) in the characteristic quatrain (or aggregation of joined quatrains) with the typically anti-climatic, sometimes parenthetical usage of the fourth 'line (see, for example, 'Motors and urchins contest the city streets' in 'Obituary'). Similarly, the vocabulary is often derived from Eliot: 'You have no more chance than an infusiorian/ Lodged in a hollow molar of an eochippus./Come, now, no prattle of remergence with the ὄντως ὄν' (from 'Horation Epode'). All, without a single exception, whether the subject be Webster, Pope, the death of little boys, or their sleeping ('Ditty') reveal a bitter, angry and passionate rejection of the present, of contemporaneity where 'you, so crazy and inviolate' are 'hurled religiously/Upon your business of humility/Into the iron forestries of hell;/. . . Dazed, while the worldless heavens bulge and reel/In the cold reverie of an idiot.'

It is a present in which even 'little boys grown patient at last, weary,/Surrender their eyes immeasurably to the night,/and other 'Little boys no longer sight the plover/Streaked in the sky . . .' while 'men, who fail . . . will plunge, mile after mile of men, to crush this lucent madness of the face,/Go home and put their heads upon the pillow. Turn with whatever shift the darkness cleaves,/Tuck in their eyes, and cover/The flying dark with sleep like falling leaves.' I hope it is excusable to resort to the sort of mosaic of several poems I have just composed in order to point a paradox: Allen Tate, beginning his career as a young poet in the early twenties, was affirming his allegiances with the classical past in the unsigned editorials of *The Fugitive* and, at the same time, betraying in every poem he was writing a frankly nihilistic temper which, in its alternating violence and absolution, was a

romanticism of a more fiery brand than his critical writings might have endorsed. Perhaps the gauge of Tate's youthful romanticism might be best explored in his much admired 'Death of Little Boys' published in *The Nation* in 1925 when Tate was twenty-six years old:

> When little boys grown patient at last, weary,
> Surrender their eyes immeasurably to the night,
> The event will rage terrific as the sea;
> Their bodies fill a crumbling room with light.
>
> Then you will touch at the bedside, torn in two,
> Gold curls now deftly intricate with gray
> As the windowpane extends a fear to you
> From one peeled aster drenched with the wind all day.
>
> And over his chest the covers in an ultimate dream
> Will mount to the teeth, ascend the eyes, press back
> The locks—while round his sturdy belly gleam
> The suspended breaths, white spars above the wreck:
>
> Till all the guests, come in to look, turn down
> Their palms, and delirium assails the cliff
> Of Norway where you ponder, and your little town
> Reels like a sailor drunk in his rotten skiff.
>
> The bleak sunshine shrieks its chipped music then
> Out to the milkweed amid the fields of wheat.
> There is a calm for you where men and women
> Unroll the chill precision of moving feet.

The only 'classical' element in this very adventuresome poem is the plural in the title and the first line. The generalizing character of 'boys' extends or is intended to extend, an individual experience of death to a universal statement of it. But apart from this gesture (a not unsuccessful one) there is no concession anywhere in the poem (unless it be in the rather freely diversified quatrains) to any poem that I am familiar with in the 'tradition' of English literature up to 1925. The poem is, I think, a consideration of the problem of identity or, more philosophically, that of permanence and change. The 'you' of the second paragraph is not merely rhetorical address which seeks to involve the reader with the death of little boys, but it operates so as to

achieve exactly that; the bedside is 'torn in two' by the 'event' of death which, let us note, does not destroy the little boys but rather the room which crumbles with light. (The room, of course, may be everything which is contained in it.) The 'gold curls' are 'now deftly intricate with gray' because of the blinding vision of death in which 'you' (the onlooker, father, or little boy grown up) must participate because you too feel the fear extended by the window-pane (night or death to which the little boys have in stanza one surrendered their eyes). The emotional affects, throughout, are persistently ascribed to the landscape.

In stanza three the death is individualized in the singular pronouns (abandoning the universal), in the magnificently concrete, yet symbolic detail of the 'sturdy belly' round which 'gleam the suspended breaths' (of the dead boy, or rather boy-in-man), and 'you' (like another Hamlet, a questioning, dubious intellect) pondering on your cliff (although it *was* Denmark), feel delirium (death, mortality, shifting identity) assailing it (just as, in a similar transfer of affects, it was the *room* and not the body which crumbled in stanza one), and your little town (something built, *made*, the ego, perhaps) 'reels like a sailor drunk in his rotten skiff.' Here the image of the dead boy as a wreck and the little town (the ego) about to be wrecked converge in the sea symbolism. It is at this point (the crisis of the poem) that the fusion of meanings is consummated, and the question of permanence (identity) arises like a lonely phoenix from the wreck of little boys (your wreck, of course). The last stanza is an anticlimax, and is so intended. The 'bleak sunshine', the discordant shriek of its 'chipped music' reaches out to the level of external quotidien existence (milkweed, etc.) where there are no more 'events terrific as the sea' but only a chill order and deceptive, ironic calm whose inevitable 'precision of moving feet' implies an ultimately similar dissolution of the almost-wrecked ego.

Perhaps this explication will have seemed forced. In that event, I suggest returning to the sea metaphor introduced in stanza one, picked up and developed in three and consummated in the harsh despair of 'Reels', 'drunk' and 'rotten' to say nothing of the flimsy, phonetic fluff of 'skiff'. By that route, it seems to me, almost the same reading may be developed as the one I have got by the long way: Little boys die in men before men die. Man is torn in two by his past (his little boyhood) and his

present. The agency of childhood is mysterious and terrifying in the personality of the man (the aster is man 'peeled'—revealed —by his youth). The guests come in to look, unseeing. The certainty of identity (integration of personality) is seriously threatened in stanza four. In stanza five there is a sick rebound: the world and its dull, mechanic inevitability must be met again. The let-down in diction, the clarity of the last stanza as opposed to the complexity of the others is Tate's cold and disdainful bow to the outer world, to the nowness he *will* not recognize. This, then, is the kind of poetry Tate was writing when he was raging with youthful hauteur against the nouveaux-arrivés 'experimentalists' who seemed to hold sway in New York. To recapitulate: 'Death of Little Boys' is, I think, a very good poem; it is revelatory of Tate's 'original', temperamental bent (if twenty-five years of learning had not already disguised the interior man); it is certainly as 'experimental' as any poem I know of written at that time, including the 'romantic' experimentalism of Hart Crane, Tate's friend.

III

The following five years, 1925–30, are crucial to the direction of Tate's poetic growth. Some residence in England and France during that time leave superficial traces in his work and not merely on the allusive level. If he ever thought of himself as an exile (and at least one poem, 'Message from Abroad' (1929), if not more, bears witness that he did) it was certainly not the kind of willed exile represented by Joyce's categorical imperatives for the artist: 'Silence, exile and cunning', nor by Henry James's ambassadorial rapproachements, nor by Eliot's British repatriation. Europe merely re-enforces for Tate the feeling he started out with in Kentucky. He is exiled not from a place, but from a condition. The present (and Europe is just as contemporaneous as the South) exiles him from the past. He is cut off *through no fault of his own* from a more meaningful condition of living. He will begin to try in these years to find, focus, and define the character of that past and so, perhaps, to imaginatively possess it. Like many young men of his time, but with greater tenacity and intellectual resourcefulness, he takes Eliot as his guide of that dark country. It is now that Tate begins to deny the authority of his own sensibility as poet. It is his first mis-step, but, happily, not a disastrous one.

In 1925, in 'Retroduction to American History', Tate found it possible to arraign the present in these terms:

> Narcissus is vocabulary. Hermes decorates
> A cornice on the Third National Bank. Vocabulary
> Becomes confusion, decoration a blight; the Parthenon
> In Tennessee stucco, art for the sake of death.
> (The bedpost receding in stillness) you brush your teeth
> 'Hitting on all thirty-two'; scholarship pares
> The nails of Catullus, sniffs his sheets, restores
> His 'passionate underwear'; morality disciplines
> the other
> Person; every son-of-a-bitch is Christ, at least Rousseau;

But there the cataloguing of deprivations and evils, wrought upon the poet by his environment seems a trifle uncontrolled: there is a false and heavy-handed exaggeration in the view of historical scholarship (a method Tate despises) which is seen to restore Catullus's 'passionate underwear'; there is an inchoate imprecision of epithet to 'every son-of-a-bitch is Christ, at least Rousseau'. Yet an interesting premonition of the way in which Tate was later to define the past, a definition differing in subtle details from Eliot's, occurs in a Websterian passage later in this long poem:

> A corpse is your bedfellow, your great-grandfather dines
> With you this evening on a cavalry horse. Intellect
> Connives with heredity, creates fate as Euclid geometry
> By definition.

Nevertheless, the poem's end is more temperate than the violent castigations of the earlier sections might lead one to expect:

> Heredity
> Proposes love, love exacts language, and we lack
> Language. When shall we speak again? When shall
> The sparrow dusting the gutter sing? When shall
> This drift with silence meet the sun? When shall
> I wake?

Thus the past (heredity) begets love, love (containing the past) as an outgoing, positive force demands to be expressed, communicated, but the means (language) is recalcitrant. Our past need not be sought: it is in the 'sunlit bones' in our house. But how

to establish this knowledge, this good meaningfully as an objective, communicating reality? Tate, then, at the beginning of his career, had, or so it seemed, a certain advantage over Eliot, an advantage deriving perhaps from the relative homogeneity of Southern society as opposed to the crude mixture of frontier strains and Back Bay *manqué* which were, no doubt, the conditional and never-accepted 'heredity' of the St. Louis of the latter's boyhood and adolescence.

But if such hope were possible in 1925, by 1927 the chances for solving the problem of communication, of, in short, denying the obstructive features of the material present seem slenderer. There is the delicate shadow of despair beginning to creep into the poems. It is a nostalgic, melancholy, and deliberately archaic tone in which the poet asks his friend, Edmund Wilson the critic, 'a Syracusan, domiciled at Rome' to 'be still' lest he, 'the city priest/Urging crab-like the busy quest' find suddenly like 'an eager crab' that both the East and the West escape him and that he toils 'more than the rest of us/For the idiot king of a savage court.' The final quatrain, sustaining technically the intimate, epistolary, twentieth-century Horatianism of the poem, describes somewhat sentimentally but nevertheless with effective hopelessness the character of the urban present:

> Once we had marvelled countrywise,
> My friend. You know that light was brief.
> Mile after mile the cities rise
> Where brisk Adonis tied the sheaf.

'You know that light was brief.' How just, how recriminatory, how resigned, in short, to the inevitable encroachment of the industrial Leviathan which modern economy symbolizes for Tate! The social historian will, of course, try to tell us that this is merely a biographical allusion to the time in the early twenties when Malcolm Cowley, Tate, Hart Crane, Caroline Gordon and other talented young men and women trying to make their way in the arts lived in a small community in rural New York, where country experience provided a brief happy respite from the reality of the 'rising cities' which, even as they were fled from, pursued the fugitives 'Where brisk Adonis tied the sheaf'. We need not disagree with the historian. The allusion is there and it is too specific to be denied. What is more valuable is that the allusion is merely

the occasion for a wider generalization about the nature of American society, a society where the classical tradition (bound up as it was with the leisured way of life of gentlemen who could be philosophers and farmers at the same time) flared briefly, especially in New England (Wilson) and the South (Tate), only to be extinguished by 'mile after mile' of an urban, unillumined, industrial culture.

This poem, then, may be thought of as a key to a period when Tate was trying to *think* out his dilemma, instead of merely *feeling* his way out of it, as he did in the powerful early poems. That these years initiated his most prolific critical activity is not at all out of line with the evidence of the poems themselves. 'Fragment of Meditation' (1928), as the title implies, continues this self-examination in an attempt to gather up 'all the venom of the night-/Th' equilibrium of the thirtieth age.' The attempt is to abandon the vexation, the fury, the sense of loss of the earlier years of young manhood and to come to terms, somehow, with one's heritage heretofore seen as inoperative because of the problem of communication; the attempt is, realistically, to *communicate* that past, to *find* the language. And Tate does find it. He finds it in the forensic, yet casually idiomatic speech of his ancestors and of their own best survival in Southern cultural remains. (It was at about this time that Tate in an essay seeking to explain the curious aridity of the literary production of the great ante-bellum years of the South pointed out that the best energies and talents of the South went into politics and the law—the latter the passport, of course, to the former.) 'It was a time of tributes.' Tate pays them: To Calhoun 'who divined/How the great western's star's last race will run/Unbridled round our personal defect,/Grinding its ash with engines of its mind./"Too Southern and too simple",'; to Poe, 'the poet against the world; he dreamed the soul/Of the wide world and prodigies to come;/Examplar of dignity, a gentleman/Who raised the black flag of the nether mind;/Hated in life, of all; in death praised;/' and concludes:

> Perhaps at the age of thirty one shall see
> In the wide world the prodigies to come:
> The long-gestating Christ, the Agnulus
> Of time got in the belly of abstraction
> By Ambition, a bull of pious use.

But the aftermath to this briefly sustained wish is an ironic, thoroughly illusionless defeat, brought home with especial power in the massive, sonorous cadences of the vowel structure of the last, Dryden-like line:

> The Bull smoothly rolls his powerful tongue.

I think this very interesting but uneven poem breaks down precisely at the point where the moving and effectively communicated loyalties to the past are exhausted and the satire against modern anti-miracleism takes over. Too many deifications or hypostatizations begin to do the work of the concrete particulars which are active in the more successful early sections of the poem. We get instead 'Agnulus', 'Ambition', 'Pasiphae', 'Lamb', 'Holy Runt', in the space of a few lines. The irony is heavy, not cutting. Is it too fanciful to suggest that the split in the poem reflects a split in the poet's own spectrum of belief? He is positive, concrete, and eloquent in his tribute to the past he believes in: he is negative, allusive, literary in his view of the present which he distrusts and detemporizes. This is the obverse of the sin Tate in his criticism lays at the door of the scientific historians who seek, he says, to 'detemporize' or neutralize the past, which he prefers to view as a series of discrete particulars. Thus, this satire on irreligion, is an act of fashionable piety, expressive of an outer malaise of spirit which was then becoming a fashionable mood and which Tate seeks to incorporate into his own inner terror. It is as if an instructed but unbaptized cannibal child were seeking to eat his evangelized father who has given up the habit of dining on his relatives.

In different keys and with great invention and melody these years are devoted to a fuller exploration of the dilemma I have just outlined. In various settings we find the poet pondering the identical question he asks in 'Message from Abroad' dated Paris, November 1929:

> What years of the other times, what centuries
> Broken, divided up and claimed? A few
> Here and there to the taste . . .
> . . . . . to keep us
> Fearless, not worried as the hare, scurrying
> Without memory . . .

The sense of the past is here conceived of as a humanizing agency. Tate considers Provence, the Renaissance, the age of Pericles, 'all notorious',/Lettered, sculptured and rhymed;/Those others, incuriously complete, lost,/Not by poetry and statues timed,/'. It is 'those others' he is now bent on finding, for complete as they are, they are 'lost' in the individual subconscious biography. And it is here that Tate introduces an image which is to recur in various forms in his poetry for the next fifteen years: it is a father image, ancestor-image, if you will, and it haunts the poet's psyche in concrete, visible shape:

> And the man red-faced and tall seen, leaning
> In the day of his strength
> Not as a pine, but the stiff form
> Against the west pillar,
> Hearing the ox-cart in the street—
> His shadow gliding, a long nigger
> Gliding at his feet.

The imagery is, of course, exact, personal and beautiful. The last two lines, in which the metaphor of the encroaching shadow as a 'long nigger' appropriate as it is to the physical context of the Southern man he is painting from memory and from love, the repetition of 'gliding' in the last line completing perfectly the suggestion of time (a shadow) engulfing the individual, but yet with a tenderness which comes somehow into poignant conflict with the inevitability of the last short line (shorter by at least half a measure than any line in the stanza).

But the image is 'drowned deep', cannot be seen at all in exile, 'Down Saint-Michel by the quays', and the failure to realize the individual image is extended to include the whole of that society which the father image represents:

> I cannot see you
> The incorruptibles,
> Yours was a secret fate,
> The stiff-backed liars, the dupes:
> . . .
> Your anger is out of date—

In the very last three lines the symbol of personal loss again dramatizes the elegiac theme of a lost past:

The man red-faced and tall
Will cast no shadow
From the province of the drowned.

Perhaps the most ambitious poem of this period, and one which summarizes the intellectual situation of Tate at the beginning of the thirties is 'Causerie' (1925–31). The tone is again forensic; but the vigour of the indictment is thoroughly sustained from beginning to end. What is more, unlike his speech in 'Meditation', he depends here on a rugged, irregular blank verse manipulated with great flexibility in terms of caesura to effect a swelling and urgent rhetoric. The poet is the prosecutor; yet he is himself among the accused:

I've done no rape, arson, incest, no murder,
Yet cannot sleep. . . .

In a different metaphor, he asks the question of 'Message from Abroad':

Where is your house, in which room stands your bed?

In ironic response comes then a brilliant, swift, Elizabethan-in-texture arraignment of the fate suffered by the South:

. . . Have you a daughter,
Daughters are the seed of occupations,
Of asperities, such as wills, deeds, mortgages,
Duels, estates, statesmen, pioneers, embezzlers,
Eminent Virginians, reminiscences, bastards,
The bar-sinister hushed, effaced by the porcelain tub.
A Daughter is the fruit of occupation;
Let her not read history lest knowledge
Of her fathers instruct her to be a noted bawd.

The argument proceeds by a kind of rhetorical casuality (note the force of the 'For' in the passage following):

For miracles are faint
And resurrection is our weakest point of religion,
I have known men in my youth who foundered on
This point of doctrine:
. . .
They waited. I, who watched out the first crisis
With them, wait:
For the incredible image. . . .

There follows a long meditative passage lower in tension but with many individually beautiful lines:

> The Lord God wastes his substance towards the ocean.
> In Christ we have lived, on the flood of Christ borne up,
> Who now is a precipitate flood of silence,
> We a drenched wreck off an imponderable shore:

Later the character of this wreckage is defined as a loss of absolutes:

> . . . the Annabella
> Of proper incest, no longer incestuous:
> In an age of abstract experience, fornication
> Is self-expression, adjunct to Christian euphoria,
> And whores become delinquents; delinquents, patients;
> Patients, wards of society. Whores, by that rule,
> Are precious.

The result is 'a race of politic pimps'. 'The antique courtesy of your myths . . . sleep under a still shadow.' What Tate regrets here is the loss of the principle of evil, of which Wallace Stevens was to say fifteen years later: 'the death of Satan was a tragedy/ For the imagination . . .' But, and I think this a distinction which illuminates Tate's special quality as a moralist, he does not, like Stevens, relate this loss to its effect on art, but rather to its effect on conduct. This is didactic poetry of such high order, that the didacticism is (as in Blake) through the purest rhetorical fusion indistinguishable from the poetry. The control is sure and adult. The entirety of the loss is acknowledged; there is no longer an effort to reclaim the lost from 'the province of the drowned'. The poet is operating on a higher level of social 'reality', as it were; but there is no acceptance—yet.

In the long view, the years 1930–35 seem for the most part to be a kind of intellectual and emotional marking-time for Tate. (Nevertheless, it was during this period that he was very active in prose composition.) There is evidence of a good deal of reading, especially in the metaphysical poets, there is much experiment in form—odes, elegies, pastorals, several fine metaphysical love poems (the only love poems composed up to this time). The titles themselves reflect quite transparently some of the literary pre-occupations: 'The Mediterranean', for example, considered by

some one of Tate's finest poems, is Coleridgean in form, and Arnoldian in symbolism. The Mediterranean is the sea of faith (as is another body of water in 'Dover Beach'): 'Atlantis howls but is no longer steep.' The poem ends with a vision of the fecund and luxurious exhaustion of the South, the South conceived of as the inheritor of classical culture by a kind of mystical primogeniture, a notion Tate argues well in his essays: 'the tired land where tasseling corn,/Fat beans, grapes sweeter than muscadine/Rot on the vine: in that land were we born.'

'Aeneas at Washington' is another poem deriving from this nexus of speculation. The South is again conceived of as Europe, especially as it is the inheritor of Rome. Aeneas, of course, is the poet himself; like the antique poet, he is an exile. He sees 'all things apart'. The reference is to one of Tate's most abiding critical values: to see the past as a series of distinct concrete particulars. The poem closes on a note of frustration and perplexity:

> Stuck in the wet mire
> Four thousand leagues from the ninth buried city
> I thought of Troy, what we had built her for.

This poem, as well as 'The Mediterranean' and 'To the Lacedemonians' betrays a weakness common to some poems of this period in that the poet's critical 'ideas', or 'philosophic metaphors' are seen vividly operative in the poems. The 'ideas' are not sufficiently complicated by symbols of emotional opacity or sensuous richness to raise the language into that realm of verbal intensity where Tate's best poetry moves. Nevertheless, 'To the Lacedemonians' is particularly interesting in that it provides an independent exercise of one of Tate's favourite and, indeed, plausible, hypotheses about the moral character of the antebellum South, the theory that it was a society destined to ruin by the very excess of its virtue: 'Vain chivalry of the personal will!'—a theory he was later to crystallize with great poetic splendour in the final version of 'Ode To the Confederate Dead', a poem worked on concurrently with the one now under discussion (although it was first written in 1926 and not completed to Tate's satisfaction until 1936).

The language of 'To the Lacedemonians' reflects the influence of St.-J. Perse, perhaps assimilated through Eliot's translation of Perse's *Anabasis* published in 1930. Indeed, Tate has called one

of his elegies of this period 'The Anabasis', the title operating as an equivalent for death. However, the delicately archaic linguistic texture, largely dependent on inversions and metric distortions of customary pronunciations, is quite unrelated to Perse's poem.

'The Meaning of Life' (1934) described as a 'monologue', and a companion piece, 'The Meaning of Death' (1935), described as 'An After-Dinner Speech', are both, as may be suspected, a discourse on time as it affects the security of personal values. Both poems are interesting for their use of the cave symbol, a symbol which recurs often in Tate's poetry and derives, no doubt, from his deep consideration of Plato's parable of the cave. The concluding line of the second of these twin speculations, 'We are the eyelids of defeated caves', was to have a more expanded restatement in some of Tate's later poetry. (See Sonnet IV of 'More Sonnets at Christmas' for the way in which the entire poem, both in form and meaning, derives from the cave image.) This line dramatizes, I think, the underlying feeling of the poems of this period (1930-35) as one of a grave and bitter defeat in the search for absolutes.

However, there is one strain in Tate's poetic sensibility which is given brief, sporadic, but eloquent expression during these years, and it must be regarded at some length both for its own sake and for the rather remarkable way in which it foreshadows by a decade the dominant temper of the best work Tate has yet done: 'Seasons of the Soul' and 'More Christmas Sonnets'. It is the vein of introspective, subjective evaluation, a mood which, of course, shares some of the content of the more purely ideological, speculative pieces I have just examined. But it is precisely the distinction between introspecting and speculating which distinguishes the two: The 'Sonnets at Christmas' (1934) dramatize in a particularly illuminating manner the fact that Tate's earlier romantic agony had not been put down as thoroughly as the critic in him might have supposed. Sonnet I states the background of the poet's examination of conscience and of memory; Sonnet II provides a particular instance of the past, an instance of personal guilt which, in a beautifully precise concrete progress, relying for its imagery on the physical accoutrements of a Southern country house, builds up to a kind of universal rebellion of the ego against the burdens pushed upon it by the *id*:

Ah, Christ, I love you rings to the wild sky
And I must think a little of the past:
When I was ten I told a stinking lie
That got a black boy whipped; but now at last
The going years, with an accurate glow,
Reverse like balls englished upon green baize—
Let them return, let the round trumpets blow
The ancient crackle of the Christ's deep gaze.
Deafened and blind, with senses yet unfound,
Am I, untutored of the after-wit
Of knowledge, knowing a nightmare has no sound;
Therefore with idle hands and head I sit
In late December before the fire's daze
Punished by crimes of which I would be quit.

Tate had accomplished this kind of *interior* dramatization just as persuasively on the level of objective drama in 'The Oath' (1931), a remarkably skillful Browning-via-Pound kind of monologue with a background very similar to that of Sonnet 11—a country house on a cold night with the trophies of ancestors on the walls. Where better to consider the metaphysics of 'Who are the dead? Who are the living and the dead?'

In the well-known 'Ode To the Confederate Dead', a poem whose final shape took ten years to solidify (Tate is known for the indefatigable re-working of his poems), we have the best example in the *Selected Poems* of the fruitful union of 'philosophic metaphor' and personal, subjective experience. To make a detailed analysis of the poem would be an impertinence in view of the magnificent job of dissection the poet has done for us in 'Narcissus as Narcissus', a long essay in which every facet of the poem's genesis, intent, and mechanics is considered with scrupulous care and objectivity. The 'Ode', Tate tells us, is about solipsism. But the attempt to connect solipsism (Narcissism) with the Confederate dead cannot be made 'logically or even historically . . . the proof of the connection must lie, if anywhere, in the experienced conflict which is the poem itself.' Still, one wonders whether the position Tate ascribes to Narcissus (the poet) is not remarkably like that he elsewhere ascribes to Thomas Hardy, the 'philosophic' writer.[1] Tate supposes that the keys to Hardy's poems are large abstractions or 'philosophic metaphors' like 'Necessity' and 'Chance' or their Victorian equivalents 'Mechanism' and Spen-

[1] See 'Thomas Hardy's Philosophic Metaphors' in *Reason and Madness*.

ser's 'Unknowable'. These ideas, Tate argues, invade the poems, determining content but not structure. Hardy is at his best when 'least philosophical' for 'his "philosophy" tends to be a little beyond the range of his feelings. . . .' Thus,

> Hardy's 'advanced' position is only another way of saying that he had come very early to be both inside and outside his background which was to be the material of his art: an ambivalent point of view that, in its infinite variations from any formula that we may state for it, is the centre of the ironic consciousness.

But is not Narcissus both inside and outside his 'background' (solipsism, the Confederate dead) as much as was Hardy with his advanced Darwinian teleology in relation to Wessex folkways and primitivism? A similar ambivalence, I think, generates in Tate, as in Hardy, the 'ironic consciousness' signal to the mood of the 'Ode'.

It should be clear, then, that the components of the poem as *idea* are not too remote from the concerns of Tate's poems and essays in the thirties and which persist as a major striation through all his work. I should like to add some observations suggested by a comparison of the first published version (1927) with the final version of 1936.

First, there is, contrary to what we sometimes like to think of as axiomatic to creation, not a suppression of material, but an expansion of it. Apparently, there are other useful economies available to the poet besides cutting. Not only are many fine lines added to the body of the poem, but the subjective 'wind-leaves' refrain, which runs throughout as a thread of opposition to the questions of the main theme, is entirely new. When there is suppression, it is of an entirely different order: the emendations so work as to suppress those *details* of a metaphor which tend to loosen its thrust, which diffuse its chargedness. Compare, for example, '. . . the silence which/Engulfs you like a mummy in time, whose niche lacks aperture', with the final version '. . . the silence which/Smothers you, a mummy in time.'

Another large class of revisions is the substitution of concrete imagery for more vaguely allusive, literary, abstractions. Consider, for example, the gain in decisiveness and finality achieved by the substitution of 'Here by the sagging gate, stopped by the well' for the earlier, Eliot-like wistfulness of 'Here at this stile, once

more, you know it all.' In short, the aim is more consistently to render the experience rather than to make statements about it: Instead of 'We have not sung; we shall not ever sing' we get, 'We shall say only the leaves whispering'; instead of 'It has only a beginning and an end'; we are given 'Night is the beginning and the end'. Perhaps the most valuable change of this sort is the magnificent substitution in the closing line (about the serpent) of the powerful 'Sentinel of the grave who counts us all', for the weak inconclusive generality: 'See what he knows—he knows us all.' If we add to these changes considerable simplification in punctuation (the over-punctuated first version hindering the flow of the soliloquy) devices like transposing the attributes of a simile from one term to the other, countless revisions in single words ('arrogant circumstance' for 'immodest circumstance', 'lurks' for 'waits', 'shut gate' for 'turnstile') all of which favour the stronger word, the change of tense from past to future ('You will curse the setting sun' from 'You have cursed the setting sun') effecting an oracular prescience in the revelations the poet is making; strengthening of an occasional key word (like 'blood') by creating a new line to expand the emotion and point it in an end rhyme ('flood')—it is clear that the 1936 version of the poem represents a great fund of technical knowledge garnered during the ten years of its making. Nevertheless, in spite of this considerable growth and consolidation of poetic power, it is not until almost a decade later that Allen Tate comes into his full and proper functioning as an integrated poetic personality.

IV

We can measure the significance of the progress by a study of *The Winter Sea* (1944). This volume of less than a dozen poems, many of them, however, of considerable length, represents Tate's poetic production for the years 1936–43. In one sense, at least, it represents an almost complete break with his previous writing: that is the forthright abandonment of the tendency of his middle period to allow his philosophic metaphors about tradition to determine the structure and content of his verse. It is just possible that his fine historical story of the ante-bellum South *The Fathers* (1938) had served Tate as a kind of comprehensive sieve for draining off the most fruitful insights of this long-nourished preoccupation into a larger and more flexible formal unit of experience

—the novel. *The Fathers*, like 'The Ode', is about those who were destroyed through what I believe Hart Crane somewhere in a letter to Tate calls 'an excess of chivalry'. The only sediment of the past to be found in the quite diverse emphases of the poems in *The Winter Sea* is the undercurrent of concern with childhood guilt (noted in the 'Sonnets at Christmas') and pushed further into symbolic use (as we shall see) in 'More Sonnets at Christmas' and in 'Seasons of the Soul'.

As a matter of fact, it would not be over-emphasizing the personal situation revealed by this volume[1] to say that it undams —as it were—the full force of the romantic strain in Tate which had seemed almost altogether inhibited during the preceding years. Nevertheless, the didactic impulse and conscious moral aim is too strong in Tate to suffer any diminution with time and courses along, a parallel stream of intention, with the early revitalized romanticism. Now, however, the moral aim is almost always concealed in satire; the discursiveness which in the past sometimes threatened to dull the critical edge is absent, for an even stricter formal control directs it with finer precision. Tate's own critical prescription for this mode of writing is certainly met by his achievement in 'Jubilo', 'Ode to Our Young Proconsuls of the Air', and 'Eclogue of the Liberal and the Poet': the moral intelligence, he had written[2] in 1940, 'gets into poetry . . . not as moral abstractions, but as form, coherence of image, and metaphor, control of tone and of rhythm, the union of these features'. He shows himself in these poems to be the master, not the dupe, of the satire. His essays in this form are vigorous, enormously witty, and, as in classical satire, full of honest prejudices. A prejudice, let it be noted in passing, is different from a *willed* belief (abstraction). 'Jubilo', using as refrain a phrase from a Negro popular song, is a tongue-in-cheek celebration of boys who 'caress the machines they ride'. The mock-heroic epic, while not at all a model, makes itself felt in 'Ode to Our Young Proconsuls' in the deliberately heightened mock-allegorical language which raises the invective to dramatic irony. At least one stanza has already achieved a happy notoriety for its sly barb at the sociological critics:

[1] I am basing some of the present discussion of *The Winter Sea* on my review of it in *Briarcliff Quarterly*, Summer 1945.

[2] See 'Miss Emily and the Bibliographer' in *Reason in Madness*.

In this bad time no part
The poet took, nor chance:
  He studied Swift and Donne,
  Ignored the Hun
While with faint heart
Proust caused the fall of France.

'False Nightmare', a telling although not altogether just indictment of Whitmanism, is sure to be quoted by Tate's enemies as evidence of his 'reactionary' views. It is a bitter poem but, carefully read, as reactionary as Jeremiah. A reviewer of this book has stated that it is hard 'to know what he [Tate] takes his stand politically for and not merely against'. I do not see that Mr Tate, or any poet for that matter, has such a responsibility. But if we must know what he is for, what he is against is a good index for finding out:

Give me this day a faith not personal
As follows: The American people fully armed
With assurance policies, righteous and harmed,
Battle the world of which they're not at all.
(III—from 'More Sonnets at Christmas')

Tate's technical resourcefulness in his disposition of the satire is amusingly illustrated in the 'Eclogue of the Liberal and the Poet' in which he uses the old convention of the pastoral dialogue with a gay and bawdy buffoonery appropriate to its modern possibilities.

We become aware, then, that in Tate's recent poetry the traditional influences (whether of structure, idea, or both) operate only as qualities, not as models. Thus, one is barely conscious of the Dante influence in 'Seasons of the Soul', his most solid achievement up to this time, but it is there in the deeply religio-ethical purpose of the poem as well as in the implied descent of the poet into his own hell. Similarly, the influence of the *Pervigilium Veneris* is felt in the erotic elements as well as in the subtle use of refrain. 'Seasons of the Soul' can, I think, be thought of as the summation of Tate's present position as poet and his probable future course. It is a revealing guide to his current stylistic practice; it is an even surer map to his present values, although it merely poses a problem. But it is by the way in which a problem is framed that the nature of its solution is implied. Let us examine the frame. The scheme of this poem is

simple: the four seasons correspond to the four elements of the ancients. Thus the chronicle is of the four ages of man in relation to the four aspects of the universe he inhabits. More specifically, however, it is modern man whose spiritual biography Tate records. Summer is the first season; the background is now:

> It was a gentle sun
> When, at the June solstice
> Green France was overrun
> With caterpillar feet.
> No head knows where its rest is
> Or may lie down with reason
> When war's usurping claws
> Shall take the heart escheat—

This suggests to the poet another summer (the summer of childhood which is identified with the summer of classical antiquity in its clarity and innocence) when 'The summer had no reason;/Then, like a primal cause/It had its timeless day.'

In 'Autumn', technically perhaps the most interesting section, the surrealist device of a dream is employed within the strict stanzaic pattern to enable the poet to prophesy, as it were, a vision of his own old age, which is revealed to him as a trap. He is caught in a deep well, an empty house (the house of the past) peopled only by ghosts, his ancestors, who refuse to recognize him. The house of the past is not real,

> The door was false—no key
> Or lock . . . yet I could see
> I had been born to it
> For miles of running brought
> Me back where I began.

The failure of the parents to recognize their son is another way, of course, of stating the problem of identity. We have seen how in his earliest writing this question occupied Tate. Now the dilemma is extended to the profoundest sort of societal epistemology: If your progenitors do not know you, if you are cut off from communications with your contemporaries ('I was down a well'), if, in short, there is no objective recognition of your identity, who are you? Along with this return to the investigation of his past, Tate also reverts to the more sensuous and concrete magery of the early 'romantic' poems, an imagery as *compulsively*

determined by inner, emotional connections and not by logical ones.

From the frustration of this cyclical returning upon himself, the poet in 'Winter', a strikingly beautiful section, makes a plea for Venus to return to her element. Christianity ('the drying God above/Hanged in his windy steeple') is dead and 'No longer bears for us/The living wound of love.' There is every reason to suppose that we must take this as Tate's mature disposition of the religious problem, a problem which he could not resolve so brutally and so finally in the middle years. As a matter of fact, in the first of 'More Christmas Sonnets' composed a little before 'Seasons of the Soul' Tate had implied the dismissal:

> Ten years is time enough to be dismayed
> By mummy Christ, head crammed between his knees.

The violence of this image, its quasi-obscenity, even, is the measure of the distance Tate travelled in the ten dismaying years from the time the question of anti-miracleism disturbed him. It is clear enough now that, as Tate once flippantly remarked, the question of Eliot's submission to the Thirty-Nine Articles was never to be a live option in his own poetry. But the pagan values are dead, too (All the sea-gods are dead). There is sex: 'The pacing animal' who turns 'The venereal awl/In the livid wound of love.' Again, a curiously effective surrealist image connects the general with the poet's (man's) particular plight: In a thick grove under the sea the poet seizes the branch of a madrepore from which a 'speaking blood' drips down[1] from the 'livid wound of love':

> 'We are the men who died
> Of self-inflicted woe,
> Lovers whose stratagem
> Led to their suicide.'
> I touched my sanguine hair
> And felt it drip above
> Their brother who, like them,
> Was maimed and did not bear
> The living wound of love.

The 'living wound of love' would seem to be suggested by the famous and controversial proem to Lucretius's *De Rerum Naturae*,

[1] This symbol of the dripping blood owes something to the passage from Dante which Tate uses as epigraph for 'Seasons of the Soul': *Allor porsi la mano un poco Avoate, e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno; e il trunco suo gridó: Perché mi schiante.*

in which the Roman poet, looking on a war-torn Italy, denuded of its produce, whole towns destroyed, calls upon Venus (as a fertility-principle) to inflict upon Mars the eternal wound of love (*aeterno volnere amoris*) and thus win peace and increase for the Romans. Here, the 'eternal wound' becomes the 'living wound', and I take the implication to be that Love, growing from the livid wound of love into the 'living' wound of love, is the only *possible* power which can rescue man from his otherwise maimed existence. It is clear from the passionate and suppliant address to Venus that she is the complex erotic symbol around which cluster the poet's hopes for various kinds of regeneration:

> All the sea-gods are dead
> You, Venus, come home
> To your salt maidenhead.

This reading, I think, is confirmed by the next section 'Spring', a liturgical chant (still within the frame of the ten line iambic-trimeter stanza) to the Mother of Silences, a figure who appears to suggest simultaneously the principle of the Virgin (the Mother, Life) and the principle of Death (the Mystery); the figure, significantly, never speaks. There is a certain obscurity about this symbol which is not altogether satisfactorily defined by the following passage:

> Come, mother, and lean
> At the window with your son
> And gaze through its light frame
> These fifteen centuries
> Upon the shirking scene
> Where men, blind, go lame:

The figure of the mother here appears to refer to Saint Monica as she appears in Book IX, Chapter X, of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, in which he recounts 'A Conversation He Had With His Mother Concerning the Kingdom of Heaven'. Mother and son stand alone 'leaning in a certain window, from which the garden of the house we occupied at Ostia could be seen'; and they catalogue a set of earthly conditions, which, could they be 'silenced' would enable them to arrive at an apprehension of the 'hereafter'. Soon after this talk (see Chapter X), Monica dies and leaves Augustine with a living wound too, 'from having that most sweet and dear habit of living together suddenly broken off'. Thus the

Mother of Silences is a particular mother (St. Monica), the Virgin, The Mystery and, through Augustine's unmentioned wound, she also is identified with the principle of Love. Love, then appears to be the most luminous quality dominating the symbol; yet in this last section one feels that the possibility of regeneration through Love is reluctantly abandoned and death is sought as the only certain kindness to which man can aspire.

'Seasons of the Soul' will stand, I am willing to predict, as a major event in Tate's poetic career. It is tragic, sensuous, lyrical, and deeply compassionate. It is, for whatever meaning that chameleon-term may still carry, romantic. In a very interesting essay written some years ago, 'Tension in Poetry', Tate attempts to distinguish the metaphysical from the romantic poet in the following way:

> The metaphysical poet as a rationalist begins at or near the extensive or denotative end of the line. The romantic or Symbolist poet at the other, intensive end; and each by a straining feat of the imagination tries to push his meaning as far as he can toward the opposite end, so as to occupy the entire scale. . . . It would be a hard task to choose between the two strategies, the Symbolist and the metaphysical; both at their best are great, and both are incomplete.

He then proceeds to discuss a 'poetry of the centre', that is, a 'poetry of tension in which the "strategy" is diffused into the unitary effect'. I am not sure after several re-readings of this essay as to just how this tension is consummated. As a matter of fact I would go so far as to say that the concept of 'tension' has been used by some other critics (although not by Tate) to get around a lot of poetic problems, far more tedious to unravel than to designate as illustrative of 'tension'.

However, if there is a poetry of tension, and if there is a living practitioner of this awesome and marvellous feat of poetic balance between the classic and the romantic, the metaphysical and the Symbolist, among us, surely it is Tate himself. But recently it has become evident that he is more than that: the concept of the poet as the daring young man on the flying trapeze is giving way to a less perilous but far more satisfying sort of enterprise: the paradoxical roles of suppliant and teacher have lost their separate identities in a profound and humble appreciation of what

Miguel de Unamuno calls 'the tragic sense of life'. In 'Winter Mask—To the Memory of W. B. Yeats' (1943,) Tate writes:

I asked the master Yeats
Whose great style could not tell
Why it is man hates
His own salvatiòn,
Prefers the way to hell,
And finds his last safety
In the self-made curse that bore
Him towards damnatiòn:
The drowned undrowned by the sea,
The sea worth living for.

THE POETRY OF JOHN CROWE RANSOM

VIVIENNE KOCH

I

WHEN in 1922 an unknown group of young men in Nashville, Tennessee, published the first issue of *The Fugitive*, a publication later to secure a small fame as the nursery of some interesting poetic talents,[1] it announced that '*The Fugitive* flees from nothing faster than from the high caste Brahmins of the Old South'. The unsigned editorial[2] continued in a vein revealing the compulsions of the very Brahminism it professed to reject 'Without raising the question of whether the blood in the veins of its editors runs red, they at any rate are not advertising it as blue; indeed as to pedigree, they cheerfully invite the most unfavourable inference. . . .'

John Crowe Ransom, born in 1888 in Kentucky, the son of a minister, was educated at Vanderbilt and as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, having served as a first lieutenant in World War I, and was a member of the English faculty at Vanderbilt University.

[1] John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren and Merrill Moore were among the original members of the *Fugitive* group.

[2] I am informed by one of the *Fugitives* that the editorial was composed by Ransom and endorsed by the others.

He was, with the exception of Sidney Mitron-Hirsch, the dilettante sponsor of the group, its eldest member. Several of the younger men were students at Vanderbilt and knew Ransom as their teacher; more importantly, he was their mentor in poetry, for he had already published one book of poems.

When one reads this collection, *Poems About God* (1919), all of which the author has wisely suppressed in later collections, the friendly critic could wish to let sleeping dogs lie. Still, the poet was in his twenty-ninth year when they were written,[1] they were published in his thirty-first, and the poems can in no sense be considered juvenile, although their role in Ransom's subsequent poetic career should, perhaps, secure them such a designation. Certainly, *Poems About God* as they relate to Ransom's later production, dramatize one of the most interesting cases of split personality, or more accurately, sensibility, in the history of American letters. It is only the wry, somewhat self-deprecatory Introduction, where the young poet writes of himself in the third person, which seems to connect at all with the Ransom we now know.

As he was to do four years later in *The Fugitive*'s first editorial, Ransom makes a perfunctory bow to his inheritance, mentioning the Southern accents 'into which he seems determined not to lapse'. The scheme of the poems, he tells us, grew out of his recognition that his first poems all used the word 'God' and that this was the most poetic of all terms possible, since he 'went to work to treat rather systematically of the occasions in which this term was in use with *common American men*'. The curious Whitmanism suggested by the words Ransom italicized was an attachment never again to appear in his writings, but the notion that God was the most poetic of all possible terms, was one which was to continue to disturb him. His final disposition of the problem eleven years later in a prose study, *God Without Thunder* (1930), was, as the title suggests, a pragmatic compromise.

In reality, the *Poems About God* are not nearly so studiously schematized as the author's Introduction would suggest. When 'God' does not appear in a poem, the word 'Christian' occurs, no doubt to keep the frame of reference straight for the reader. In effect, however, the tone of the poems is hardly religious or devotional. It is just possible, although this seems to me over-ingenious as an explanation, that there was a deliberate irony implicit in the

[1] See the Introduction to *Poems About God.*

very *absence* of a religious tone in contexts where these words occurred. For example, in 'Noonday Grace', a Rupert Brooke-ish enumeration of the culinary details of a country dinner, God gets in because it is He who helps the narrator's mother cook so superbly, while in 'Prayer' God is conceived as a chivalrous gentleman, undoubtedly Southern. In this connection it is a little embarrassing to notice that in 'Sunset', an incredible 'free-verse' performance, which may well be the psychic source of Ransom's later unwillingness to grant any validity to that prosody, the swain speaks to his adored one in praise of Rover, who, like God in 'Prayer', is also a 'gentleman' and, here, specifically 'Southern'.

> And now he is hungry and tired.
> But he is a Southern gentleman
> And will not whimper once
> Though you keep him waiting forever.

Need I point out that the swain is really talking about himself.

All of the *Poems About God* are Emersonian in their sense of aspiration and Frostian in their feeling for the detail of Southern country life. This was the time of Frost's great popularity in America. *A Boy's Will* published in 1915, had been followed by *Mountain Interval* and *North of Boston.* Ransom's predilection for homely domestic scenes, for a rather refined colloquialism, as well as the predominantly bantering humour with which these materials are employed, all suggest a close and admiring study of the New England poet. 'Grace' is a Southern version of Frost's 'Death of the Hired Man' and, as a matter of fact, its skilful realism, the brutal incongruity of the anti-poetic effects surrounding the hired man's death in the fields makes for an honest and fairly interesting narrative poem. On the whole though, unlike Frost, Ransom rarely bothers to employ a dramatic narrative frame. Most of the *Poems About God* are 'I' poems, and transparently autobiographical. There are Southern people, the poet's parents, a Southern reverence for women (with the exceptions of 'drabs . . . fondled for pay'), a great deal of talk about eating, some pretty country scenery, and a surprisingly adolescent sense of sin in relation to sex.

Still, even in this highly inauspicious collection, so different in its heavy-handed and literal descriptiveness from the ingenious, swiftly-contrived dramatic situations of Ransom's later work, there are a few faint adumbrations of his more mature interests.

'Overtures', a rather sentimental and conventional love poem, employs the type of archaic situation which Ransom was later to use so successfully as dramatic framework for his poems, while 'The Wicked Swimmer' suggests his subsequent usage of an antique vocabulary for supporting the sort of milieu employed in 'Overtures'. But it is in 'The School', a blank-verse confessional, that Ransom intimates his awareness of a conflict that was later to become a dominant strain in his poetic investigations:

> Equipped with Grecian thoughts, how could I live
> Among my father's folk? My father's house
> Was narrow and his fields were nauseous.
> I kicked his clods for being common dirt,
> Worthy a world which never could be Greek;
> Cursed the paternity that planted me
> One green leaf in a wilderness of autumn.

This conflict between the classically-trained man and his inimical environment is dealt with in 'Philomela' written perhaps four or five years later, but the nuances of irony, of detached self-appraisal which enrich the latter poem, could never have been predicted on the basis of the rough romantic rebelliousness of 'The School'. Later, this conflict was to split into two versions of it: the conflict between the mythic past and the de-valued present, and the same conflict, reduced to social scale, between the Old South and the new industrial South. But this schematization, while it may account for a good many of the preliminary pieces in Ransom's prose, and, surely, in some of his poetry, cannot be made to serve as explanation for his most interesting work. Robert Penn Warren, I gather, is inclined to use this conflict as a key to Ransom's poetry, which he describes as 'peculiarly whole' and 'systematic' and which 'refers to a centre which is precise, and has been objectively formulated by the poet himself, although not in relation to his poetry.' Although Warren himself does not produce a satisfactory definition of that centre, he says of it:

> It is to be defined in terms of that sensibility whose decay Ransom, along with other critics, has bewailed.... To an astonishing degree, in far more than a majority of cases, the hero or heroine of the poems is a sufferer from that complaint of 'dissociation of sensibility'. The poem itself is a commentary on the situation, its irony deriving from the fact that these perhaps otherwise admirable people 'cannot

> fathom nor perform their nature'. In general they represent a disorder contrary to the principles of order which the poet, in his more explicit, non-poetic work has defended.[1]

As a matter of fact, on a purely quantitative count of those poems which Ransom has selected for preservation in his *Selected Poems* (1945),[2] the majority of the heroes or heroines, while they may suffer from a 'dissociation of sensibility' as Mr Warren states, do not suffer this condition because of the myths of nineteenth-century science like 'evolution' and 'vitalism' which they have uncritically accepted and which, according to Mr Warren, are at the roots of their disorder. On the contrary, the split in sensibility, when present, usually reflects human situations which have always given rise to conflict, and probably always will. Such poems, to be numbered among Ransom's best, as 'Miriam Tazewell', 'Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter', 'Lost Lady', 'Blue Girls', 'Old Man Playing With Children', 'Janet Waking', 'Winter Remembered', 'Parting at Dawn', 'Vaunting Oak', 'Her Eyes', 'Parting Without a Sequel', 'The Equilibrists', 'Prelude to an Evening', 'Of Margaret', 'Spectral Lovers', 'Emily Hardcastle, Spinster', and others derive their irony, as we shall see, very incidentally, if at all, from the 'dissociation of sensibility' stemming from an invading and hostile science. That a few of Ransom's poems, such as 'Philomela', 'Captain Carpenter', 'Address to the Scholars of New England', 'Adventure This Side Pluralism', 'Plea in Mitigation', 'Raspberry Winter', 'Prometheus in Straits',[3] 'Amphibious Crocodile',[4] do, indeed, reflect such a conflict either directly or obliquely, is incontrovertible. With Ransom, as with other critics who are also poets, we do a critical disservice to his poems if we read his critical values into them too naïvely.

When in 1924 Ransom's second volume of poems, *Chills and Fever* [5] appeared, the little introductory poem seemed to profess an attitude toward experience which implied a break with popular poetic attitudes, but, looking backwards, it seems a fairly common-

[1] *Virginia Quarterly Review*, January, 1935.

[2] The number, 42, is shockingly small. Ransom is as severe with himself as he might be for others.

[3] It may not be without significance for my analysis that Ransom has eliminated the last four poems (originally in *Chills and Fever*) from the *Selected Poems*.

[4] Originally printed in *The Fugitive*, December, 1925, and not reprinted in the *Selected Poems*.

[5] Many of the poems had appeared in various issues of *The Fugitive* from 1922 onwards under Ransom's revealing pseudonym, 'Roger Prim', while others had had newspaper and periodical publication.

place sort of repudiation of the post-war years, a repudiation, perhaps, of romantic agony in favour of romantic irony and one which Pound had made almost a decade before in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberly', and Eliot in 'the Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock'. When, then, Robert Penn Warren says of Ransom's introductory lines,

> I will be brief,
> Assuredly I have a grief
> And I am shaken; but not as a leaf.[1]

that 'the pure emotional cry is only a fragmentary expression of the experience of which the complete sensibility is capable', the temptation to put 'complete sensibility' into apposition with Ransom's 'specific and constant effect' (irony) is irresistible to him. Warren is saying, in effect, that the experience most representative of what the 'complete sensibility is capable' is irony, a judgement I should like to take issue with, and which, as a matter of fact, Ransom himself, in his critical guise, would question. Irony, it seems to me, is a special instrument or special attitude (depending on its usage) relevant to special situations in human experience. It may be more inclusive, more complex, than primary attitudes like hostility, for example, but that it represents the experience of the 'complete sensibility' more adequately than other 'effects' is hardly proven by merely asserting it. Mr Ransom, in a somewhat impatient but acute admonition to Cleanth Brooks, says of Brooks' view of irony in his *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*:

> My belief is that opposites can never be said to be reconciled merely because they have been got into the same complex of effective experience to create there a kind of 'tension'; that if there is a resolution at all it must be a logical resolution; that when there is no resolution we have a poem without a structural unity; and that this is precisely the intention of irony, which therefore is something very special and ought to be occasional. . . . We should so much be in favour of tragedy and irony as not to think it good policy to require them in all our poems, for fear we might bring them into bad fame.[2]

This is clear enough, and should, if Ransom's poetry were read purely, make the critics pause before affixing the familiar

[1] In truth, while Ransom nowhere in *Chills and Fever* shakes as a leaf, in 'Fall of Leaf' a neatly archaic, ballad-like tale of two lovers, the enamoured pair feel their hearts die as the leaves fall. It is quite proper, the poet would seem to say, for his characters to engage in emotions which would be indecorous, to say the least, for himself.

[2] See the essay on I. A. Richards in *The New Criticism*.

label of 'irony'. I have in the past offended in this way myself, but I am pleased to find that I qualified the special tone of Ransom's irony as it appears in individual poems. For the irony in them appears to be not a pure but a mixed effect and is often accompanied by other equally powerful emotive intentions which colour it. Still, Ransom's views on irony as they are here given were formulated almost two decades after the publication of *Chills and Fever*, supposedly the exhibition gallery of the 'new and complete' sensibility. An examination of the book on its own terms and without any *post hoc* interpolations may well be in order.

To look for a connection between the Ransom of *Poems About God* and the author of *Chills and Fever*, published five years later, at first glance appears to be as paradoxical as the separate attitudes suggested by the titles. What had happened to Ransom in the intervening years is perhaps rather for the biographer than the critic to reconstruct. It does not seem too bold to guess that, back from the wars and once more in his proper University setting, Ransom began an assiduous course of reading directed largely to the seventeenth century metaphysicals and their Cavalier descendants. In addition, once in the stimulating company of the talented young Fugitives, Ransom's interest and knowledge of what the modern poets were doing undoubtedly took on new energy and breadth. As a matter of fact, the editorials and book reviews of *The Fugitive* (some of the latter signed by Ransom) suggest that the group was highly aware of the new enterprises in poetry both in this country and abroad. And the very fact that *The Fugitive* emphasized its connections with tradition, undoubtedly compelled Ransome to engage in a systematic revaluation of his own poetic resources.

The results of this revaluation are so radical in the poems of *Chills and Fever* that, as I have said, we are tempted to diagnose a complete split in poetic personality. But more careful reading points to an equally interesting, although less dramatic explanation. We find that the themes of *Poems About God*[1] are, *generically*, present in *Chills and Fever* but translated to a different level of discourse, and purified of their former sentimentality by an objec-

[1] As a literary influence for *Poems About God* I have suggested Frost, while Warren suggests, although I do not agree with him, Hardy's *Satires of Circumstance*. In *Poems About God* Ransom neglects the dramatic frame which Hardy invariably employs in his *Satires*.

tive and careful scrutiny of the intellect. We discover, for example, that the love poems have taken on control and sophistication because of two devices, both of which lend aesthetic distance to the occasions of love: they are increasingly reliant on archaic diction and an imagery appropriate to such diction. Both elements contribute to 'situation'.

Archaic language ('perdure', 'polls', 'frore', 'woody grot', etc.) is also found in poems where the cast is predominantly colloquial and contemporary. Here, their usage presages the more cunning Ransom whose courtly turns of speech and syntax often operate as humorous reminders of the distance between the situation and the values against which it is judged. But sometimes, as in 'Fall of Leaf' which I have mentioned in another connection, where the lovers are seen against a somewhat arty mediaeval setting of St. Gregory's Tomb, charms, woodman, Holy Rood and Sweet Saint Margret's Sisterhood, and so on, the result is a contrived period supernaturalism, which in its laborious exactitude reminds one of a Cecil B. DeMille pageant film.

Often one suspects that these period pieces serve as five-finger exercise for Ransom's then increasing virtuosity. 'Number Five', another ballad written in a curious amalgam of 'literary' Irish and cockney speech, suggests such practising. There are the drunks in the inn, the timid lover, the nice girl, the howling storm outside, contrasting with the indoor cosiness, and into whose icy embrace the lover flees in desperation. But there is absolutely no drama in the balladry; some dramatic elements are merely noted. In 'Winter's Tale', another story of a timorous lover (Ransom's lovers are invariably timorous, just as his ladies are invariably rejecting. This would seem to be the wry remainder of the courtly and 'ideal' relations between the sexes in the ante-bellum South), Drury, set against an obviously fake mediaeval setting, takes instruction from his cats' behaviour and goes to court Jenny. Here, the frankness of the artifice co-operates successfully with the dryly humourous tone of the fable and the poet establishes a credible distance from other timorous lovers, closer to him in time, who like Drury might take advice from the animals.

Perhaps the loveliest assimilation of a remote diction to a moving and perennial human situation is seen in the beautifully modulated metaphysical tone of 'In Process of a Noble Alliance'.

Here a rejecting lady is consigned by the poet to her proper element:

> Reduce this lady into marble quickly
> . . .
> And crown her queen of the House of No Love:
> Ye harping the springe that catches the dove.

Another familiar theme of Ransom's, although but feebly announced in *Poems About God*, the loss of the heroic, is now handled quite differently. The 'tragedy' is not personalized, but objectified, in the framework of a mock-heroic narrative such as 'Captain Carpenter' or 'Boris of Britain'. A similar 'frame' is provided to deal with other experience of a more homely, domestic nature. Where, in *Poems About God*, Ransom's rustic observations presented in first person notations savoured of a naïve identification with his materials, that is to say of rusticity, he now invents individually appropriate dramatic situations by which to explore them. Ransom's social types, however, while still Southern have, for the most part, shifted from the country to the town. There are still the local idiots as well as the local lovers, but genteel old-maid types like Emily Hardcastle, Miriam Tazewell, or Miss Euphemia, as well as the nameless protagonist of *vers de société* like the title-piece 'Chills and Fever', suggest townfolk rather than country people.[1] The plethora of rejecting and ultimately rejected ladies in Ransom's poems seems to be a special sort of blight he inherits from Southern society. The historian of fashions in literature might note that the province of the old maid in the literature of recent years has shifted from New England to the South.

The country terrain, which Ransom had always observed closely, when it now gets into a poem is not merely catalogued but involved in the dramatic circumstances. In 'Conrad Sits in Twilight'[2] Conrad's particular malaise of age and lack of motivation are tied in with the physical defects of the region. The localism of the following stanza is honest and not sentimental, because just as autumn is on Conrad 'teasing', so (although the 'so' is precisely what Ransom suppresses in all his poems):

[1] A biographic guess to account for this would be that Nashville, the capital of Tennessee and the university seat, suggested different social explorations than had the farm country of Ransom's native Kentucky.

[2] Reprinted in the *Selected Poems* as 'Conrad in Twilight'.

Autumn days in our section
Are the most used up thing on earth
(Or in the waters under the earth)
Having no more color nor predilection
Than cornstalks too wet for the fire,
A ribbon rotting on the byre,
A man's face as weathered as straw
By the summer's flare and winter's flaw.

The culture-versus-impoverished-environment theme, which received such crude and direct expression in *Poems About God*, is now enriched by its participation in conflicts which are by nature dramatic and thus lend the prestige of their surroundings to the extraction of the fullest drama from the thematic antithesis. For example, in two poems the poet appears in the conventional but nevertheless disguised shapes of the bard and the unacknowledged king. In the first of these, 'Adventure This Side Pluralism', a long, erudite and very witty poem which Ransom unfortunately has not seen fit to reprint, the paradox of a pluralistic religious scene in which the various creeds, while fighting for their 'truths' do one another in to death, forgetting their common descent and source, the subject is given detachment from the poet's own feeling about it by the simple license of 'I rent my smooth locks and spoke.' In 'Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son', Tom, a pretty transparent substitute for the poet, a lonely man 'Yet privy to great dreams, and secret in vainglory' is variously appraised by others as an 'ambulant worm', 'a changeling . . . a Prince.'

But like a King I was subject to a King's condition
. . .
And duly appeared I at the very clock-throb appointed
In the litten room,
Nor was hailed with that love that leaps to the Heir Anointed:
'Hush, hush, he is come!'

The pathos of Tom's failure, that is to say the pathos of the poet's isolation from what he would command by love, is controlled by the somewhat transparent fable and so is kept from disintegrating into self-pity.

In at least two other poems, the poet's plight is given an even more domesticated disguise. In 'Plea in Mitigation', an humble and charming *apologia pro sua vita*, the fable tells of a doomed scholar:

Learning had stuffed his head with but lean lore
Between the front bone and the occipital

whose sad and lonely fate was 'to love unusual gods' so that he must needs feel himself outcast in his own community, with the sole possibility of social *relationship* invested in the form of friendship. In the closing stanza, the third-person fiction is thrown off and the scholar-poet speaks directly:

And if an alien hideously at feud
With those my generation, I have reason
To think to solve the fester of my treason:
A seven of friends exceeds much multitude.[1]

In the excellent light-verse poem, 'Prometheus in Straits', Prometheus finds himself among the 'garrulous gentlemen on the veranda' and is moved to confess that

My doctrine perishes for an ear that is simple.
. . .
My function concerns itself, however, with this planet

In 'Nocturne' the dualism of knowledge and experience as it causes a minor social crisis in the life of a young scholar is scored by the device of a parodied take-off on the Prufockian agony:

Our man shall cast few capers in his dark seer-sucker coat,
His grave eye subdueing the outrageous red tie at his throat,
Considering if he should carry his dutiful flesh to the ball,
Rather than upon his book, which is flat, and metaphysical.

But in Ransom's best poems, as we shall see, the objective fable is less transparent, and the tighter structural logic enriches the meaning.

In addition to the types of fable I have discussed, Ransom in *Chills and Fever* begins to take possession of another order of the fabulous. This is the fable of childhood, childhood viewed as innocence, as an eternal, fixed and necessary condition to knowledge which corrupts and is difficult and tragic in its essence. Only Death, which is knowledged too, is conceived as dignifying childhood. But the ultimate, permissive grace given to this sort of knowledge is seen more luminously in later poems like 'Dead Boy' and 'Janet Waking'. In this volume, the clearest adumbration of it is to be found in the justly admired 'Bells for John

[1] At that time the Fugitives numbered exactly seven.

Whiteside's Daughter'. But this delicately-turned elegy, into which an affectionate humour is injected by the poet's delightfully arrogant intrusion into the child's own universe of geese and grass, in the end reckons death as an incongruous visitor for:

> There was such speed in her little body,
> And such lightness in her footfall,
> It is no wonder her brown study
> Astonishes us all.

Robert Penn Warren points out quite correctly that it is the words 'astonishes' and 'vexed' which are pivotal to the pathos of the poem, and I should add the colloquial phrase, 'brown study', so homely, so domestic, yet so foreign to the nature of childhood, all 'speed' and 'lightness'. The repetition in the last stanza of the phrase, 'brown study' in conjunction with the key-word 'vexed', clinches the unwillingness of the narrator to accept the 'little lady', as departed:

> . . .
> In one house we are sternly stopped
> To say we are vexed at her brown study
> Lying so primly propped.

In 'The First Travels of Max' we find a fable of childhood in which death is apprehended not as fact, but as an essential aspect of all knowledge. The fable, although possessed of a kind of fairy-tale ingenuity, seems to me to exhibit the faults together with the virtues of some of Ransom's more perceptibly 'worked' structures. Here, as in some of the mock-heroic structures, notably that of the well-known and, I think, overrated 'Captain Carpenter', one feels Ransom allows the fairy-tale logic of the poem (which is its only 'structure') to claim too much for its total meaning. Max, the youngest Van Vrooman, travels the downward path to wisdom through a 'degenerate' forest where he meets an obscene Red Witch, whose evil nature is somewhat abstemiously symbolized by a 'wide bosom yellow as butter'. The atmosphere of an obscure but nevertheless immanent evil is adroitly built up, but the purpose for it never becomes clear. In the last stanza we are suddenly returned to a Max miraculously restored to his rightful sphere. The humorously pedantic tone in which this restoration is reported ('Max is more firmly domiciliated'), leaves us a conventionalized picture of innocence and order as the children

play under their nurse's supervision, and is meant, I assume, to communicate that the terrors of childhood are not visible to the casual eyes of adults. The entire poem, for all its deft detail, seems clumsy and ill-adapted to this end. For terror leaves its mark and Max's travels should be seen upon him (at least by the poet, who, after all, has seen all the rest) even as he plays against the deceptively green and candid lawns.

II

I should like now to consider about a dozen poems from *Chills and Fever* which Ransom has included among the poems he wishes to preserve and among which are to be found some of his very best.[1] In *The New Criticism* (1942) Ransom himself provides a useful map to the reading of these poems, although there he discusses only the principles of reading. In a discussion of I. A. Richard's use of the terms 'tone' and 'intention' which Ransom feels to be 'not quite decisive', he goes on to stress the concept of 'Dramatic Situation' (an inclusive term for the connections between tone and style, tone and manners, and tone and person addressed) as 'almost' the first head under which one should try to understand a poem. Most poems, Ransom soundly reminds us, inferentially represent some particular speaker, and from this he is led to conclude that lyric poetry derives from dramatic dialogue. Now, the dramatic situation in most of the poems I am about to discuss depends from the presence of a narrator who is the poet. The tone of the narration is usually that of an ironic detachment from its occasion. There are times, though, when the narrator gets involved, in a very special way, by the intimacy of his connection with the subject of the narrative (see 'Miriam Tazewell', 'Dead Boy' for the tone of affectionate address by which the narrator qualifies his relationship to the subjects, from whom he yet manages to keep a quite separate identity of values). This intimacy permits the poet a very close rendering of his people (for unlike Wallace Stevens, another master of the ironic who rarely populates his poetic landscapes, almost all of Ransom's poems are about people), while, at the same time, he maintains a disinterested surveillance of their actions. Sometimes,

[1] Of the poems already discussed, however, 'Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter', 'Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son', 'Conrad in Twilight', and 'Captain Carpenter' are included in *Selected Poems*. 'Husband Betrayed', a charming piece I am unable to discuss, seems a regrettable omission from the final selection.

as in 'Parting at Dawn' and 'Spectral Lovers', the poet, while involving himself in the lovers' dilemmas and stratagems, nevertheless takes an olympian and juridical view of their dispositions. Still, in poems as dissimilar as the fine metaphysical-via-Frost lyric, 'Winter Remembered', and in 'Philomela', a satiric study of the death of myth (through the agency of a first-person improvisation on the Sweeney-among-the-nightingales theme) the dramatic necessities involve the poet at once as narrator, subject and actor. It would seem, then, that it is the particular way in which the factors of tone, style and manner, and persons addressed get blended which determines the total 'atmosphere' of the poem, rather than the presence or absence of the 'given' dramatic convention of the inferential speaker.

The richness possible to some of these combinations is suggested by the well-known 'Dead Boy' whose 'tone' hovers perilously and ambiguously poised between irony and sorrow, or perhaps irony and nostalgia. The irony is complex: it is directed against the narrator himself ('Nor some of the world of outer dark, like me'), against the subject, the little cousin ('. . . dead by foul subtraction, . . . A boy not beautiful, nor good, nor clever,/ . . . A pig with a pasty face, so I had said, . . .'), and against the narrator's own judgement of the relationship of the dead boy to the equally dead Virginia past ('. . . But the little man quite dead'/I see the forbears' antique lineaments'). This fusion of elegiac and satiric moods is illuminated by the concluding stanza in which the narrator shifts his position to that of Olympian commentator:

> He was pale and little, the foolish neighbors say;
> The first fruits, saith the Preacher, the Lord has taken;
> But this was the old tree's late branch wrenched away,
> Grieving the sapless limbs, the shorn and shaken.

'Miriam Tazewell' is a poem showing Ransom's hand as distinctly in its light rhyme and half-rhyme effects and feminine endings (devices carried over from the frankly humorous early poems) as it does in its subject—the extravagant response of a southern maiden lady when her lawn is 'deflowered' by a storm. The third-person narration shifts (in the third line of the second stanza) to direct address but retains the narrative past tense:

> And the sun, Miriam, ascended his dominion,
> The storm was withered against his empyrean.

The intrusion of the poet is neither repeated nor explained. The poem continues in the casual voice of a society reporter ('Suppers and cards were calendared, and some bridals,/And the birds demurely sang in the bitten poplars'). The last stanza, while not resuming direct address brings the narrator close to his subject by his familiar use of her name:

> To Miriam Tazewell the whole world was villian
> To prosper when the fragile babes were fallen,
> And not to unstop her own storm and be maudlin
> For weeks she went untidy, she went sullen.

The third line of this stanza, as I have given it, is a substitution made in the *Selected Poems*[1] for the original, 'The principle of the beast was low and masculine', and is a brilliant example of Ransom's present absolutely secure poetic judgement. Not only does the new line drastically alter the 'logical structure' of the poem, but also, and here the fullness of the achievement enters, the 'texture' of the poem is subtly transformed by the rounding out of the tempest metaphor—its extension from the natural universe to Miriam's inner life—from a rather indulgent satire of negation to a satiric tragedy of frustration—two quite different degrees of human deprivation. The changed line has translated the poem from the realm of domestic comedy to the realm of domestic tragedy. The universe (weather at odds with Miriam Tazewell's flowers) is like Miriam's split self, and when the storm, like a violent lover, 'deflowers' Miriam's protected garden, it is a traumatic event for her.

'Spectral Lovers' is another poem whose trimming and revising for the *Selected Poems* illuminates Ransom's poetic practice. This poem is important, too, as a less successful predecessor of 'Equilibrists', which is generally felt to be one of Ransom's best 'metaphysical' pieces. Both poems deal with renunciatory lovers, except that, in the first it is the man who decides that 'This is the marble fortress not to be conquered', while in the later poem the decision against consummation is mutual; it is the lovers' predicament to discover 'Honour among thieves/Honour between lovers.' In both poems the lady's body is conceived in fairly conventional terms as respectively a city, and a field, to be taken. In both poems, too, the poet participates both as narrator and as commentator.

[1] In the 'Preface' Ransom says, 'And some of the earlier poems I have felt impelled to trim and revise a little'.

In 'Spectral Lovers' he introduces himself in the first person in the last stanza, a daring strategem:

> They passed me once in April, in the mist.
> No other season is it when one walks and discovers
> Two tall and wandering, like spectral lovers,
> White in the season's moon-gold and amethyst,
> Who touch their quick fingers fluttering like a bird
> Whose songs shall never be heard.

Still, this adventurous introduction of the poet into the *situ* of the dramatic action is rewarding: he is the spectator who vouches for the authenticity of the event he has reported, and, at the same time, there is the interesting possibility, supported by the last two lines of the first stanza, that the poet is, in reality the spectator of his own past. The shock of this recognition at the very end of the poem creates an additional dramatic and emotive dimension. The little half-wry, half-sorrowful complaint of the first stanza is now hinted to be the intimate experience of the narrator:

> Why should two lovers go frozen apart in fear?
> And yet they were, they were.

There is not only renunciation, but the somewhat rueful judgement of it. There is not only the lost past, but a conscious present which is critical of it.

The trimming and revising of 'Spectral Lovers' is heaviest in the first three and the last of its seven stanzas. An interesting substitution in stanza one is:

> Else angels lost in each other and fallen on earth

for:

> Else two immaculate angels fallen on earth.

The extra syllable of the later version permits the spondaic variation of 'each other' thus relieving the regularity of the metrical pattern of the stanza. More importantly, the substitution of 'lost in each other' for 'immaculate' is a great enrichment to the denotative element of the line. The notion of loss, really the theme of the poem, is thus set up in its third line; the original adjective 'immaculate' was a contradiction in sense to 'fallen on earth'. The logical structure of the poem has been strengthened by the change.

Some of the larger changes in stanza two and three are worth

considering for somewhat different reasons. The original version of two reads:

> Over the shredding of an April blossom
> Scarcely her fingers touched him, quick with care
> Of many delicate postures she cast a snare.
> But for all the red heart beating in the pale bosom
> Her face of cunningly tinctured ivory
> Was hard with an agony.

In the final version the changes commence with line three:

> Yet of evasions even she made a snare.
> The heart was bold that clanged within her bosom,
> The moment perfect, the time stopped for them,
> Still her face turned from him.

Two basic types of alterations have been made: substitutions of 'structure' ('paraphrasable core') and of 'texture' ('local excitement'). The elimination of the rather stale imagery of 'red heart', 'pale bosom', 'cunningly tinctured ivory', and 'hard agony', is sound. Although I do not like the somewhat literary use of 'clanged' in the revised third line, it provides, nevertheless, a stronger meaning-unit than the original. The replacement of the description of the lady's face, so cameo-true to literary type, by the information, 'The moment perfect, the time stopped for them', and completed by the anti-climactic sequence of 'Still her face turned from him' emphasizes once more the 'determinate' meaning of the poem, which is loss. So, too, the more abstract rendering of line three into 'Yet of evasions even she made a snare' tends to generalize the negative quality of the central relationship. In total impact, all the changes operate in the direction of greater *typicality* in the experience of unfulfilled love. The gestures and the features of the lovers are refined into the airy tracery of their essences, an appropriate condition for spectral persons. Still, where it is judicious to do so, Ransom willingly eliminates the general in favour of the particular.

Only two other changes in the poem require comment. The pathetic fallacy implicit in the second line of stanza three, 'Passionate being the essences of the field' is now more quietly reported as 'And the stealthy emanations of the field.' In the concluding stanza the phonetically awkward syntax of 'Two clad in the shapes of angels being lovers' is more melodically rendered,

'Two tall and wandering, like spectral lovers'. The last substitution has been in the direction of concreteness, but, it will be noticed, it is a concretion suitable to spectres. The modification also serves to revalue and reiterate the theme of loss introduced in the first stanza. I have, perhaps unjustifiably, ignored certain aspects of this poem, such as the 'local excitement' created by the little fable of the knight's wishful and symbolic beheading of the field-flowers, in an effort to reconstruct the poem's major drift as emphasized by the revisions. I might add, if the comment is not too cavalier, that the best revision given 'Spectral Lovers' occurs in an entirely separate poem, 'The Equilibrists', which I shall discuss later in this study.

Two poems which I should next like to consider, both bearing Ransom's curious signature the more visibly in that they are not wholly successful, are 'Old Mansion' and 'The Tall Girl'. The element of failure in both poems, widely separated in subject-matter, is caused by the over-elaboration of 'structure' in both. This defect, one which I have hinted at in my comments on a few other poems, notably 'Vaunting Oak' and 'Captain Carpenter' is important to understand for it is a risk which almost all of Ransom's poems undergo, although all of his best survive it and are, indeed, toughened by the exposure. This structural top-heaviness is an emphasis which clearly derives from Ransom's own critical bias. It is a bias which took its earliest shape in *God Without Thunder*, Ransom's first full-length critical work, which stresses the essential similarity in the function of poetry and myth. Both are a form of 'appreciative' knowledge, a term endebted to Kant's 'formal' knowledge and which is concerned with objects or events for their own sake. Appreciative knowledge is to be distinguished from scientific knowledge which concerns itself with objects or events in terms of their immediate practical value. According to Ransom,

> The myth of an object is its proper name, private, unique, untranslatable, overflowing, of a demonic energy that cannot be reduced to the poverty of the class concept. The myth of an event is a story which invests the natural with a supernatural background and with a more than historical history. . . . *Myth resorts to the supernatural in order to restore the fullness of the natural.*

The myth-maker 'seeks to restore the individual image, or else to go back and seek fresh experience.' Dr Gordon Mills in a thought-

ful study of Ransom's critical position[1] has pointed out that Ransom's belief that the combination of extension and intension creates the 'very great God' is correlative to his belief that poetry is created through the combination of texture and structure. According to Dr Mills,

> God, then, or the religious myth is a kind of poem. Ransom accepts this idea. He says, for example, that poetry deals more competently with mythology than do modern protestant religions . . . [but while] poetry provides knowledge of reality, like religious myth . . . it is in some way inferior to religious myth . . . poetry is crowded with little myths . . . [while] religious myths . . . must deal with no lesser objects than Gods.

But Dr Mills, while pointing out that Ransom nowhere defines myth satisfactorily, seems willing to accept Ransom's view that since all appreciative knowledge is myth and since all myth is knowledge of particulars for their own sake, 'the red chair' or 'the old oak' when used specifically are myths. This seems to me nonsense and meaningless. 'Myth', like some other terms in Ransom's ambitious critical system strives for such a high-order abstractness (fighting the scientists with their own weapons) that it tends to abrogate the very function it would claim for poetry its *superior* knowledge of reality, as opposed to the inferior knowledge of reality provided by science. If *all* knowledge of particularity is 'myth'—'the red chair', 'the green lawn', etc.—then the myth-maker at certain levels would seem to have a very commonplace function indeed as a mere *transcriber* of particulars. This is a role I do not believe Ransom would urge for him.

Again, one is tempted to transpose the syntax of Ransom's 'Religion is an institution existing for the sake of its ritual' to his critical terminology: 'A poem is a structure existing for the sake of its texture.' In Ransom's own poetic practice, however, this aim is not always realized. Often, the structure is too over-bearing and subdues the texture. In 'The Tall Girl' and 'Old Mansion', to get back to the poems, this is precisely what happens. The machinery of the structure seems too elaborate for the fragility or thinness, rather, of the texture. In 'The Tall Girl' there is an unconvincing supernaturalism (*'Myth resorts to the supernatural in order to represent the fullness of the natural'*). The 'Queens of

[1] *Myth and Ontology in the Thought of John Crowe Ransom.*

Hell' with 'lissome necks' try to seduce the 'tall girl with long tread' to their errant ways, while 'The Queen of Heaven . . . In the likeness, I hear, of a plain motherly woman' decides to best the Hell-Queens and warns the girl 'This will come to no good!' The poem leaves one with a curious sense of frustration. The diabolism of the Queens of Hell in their opposition to the Queen of Heaven, which is, indeed, the whole antithesis around which the poem is developed, seems much too infernal a machinery to set up for the little sonnet. We are not convinced of the tall girl's danger. The texture of the poem supplies no air of jeopardy except the Hell-Queens' suggestion that they walk 'by the windows where the young men are working,' unless it is the fact that the girl has 'gold hair' which might, in some circles, be taken as itself symbolic of her potential vulnerability. But then why do we need the Queens of Hell to test it? And why must a kindly old woman become the Queen of Heaven? Surely, Ransom himself would agree that we should reserve our myths for rare occasions, lest they fall in disfavour for ill-usage.

In 'Old Mansion' the supernatural in the myth is not quite so close to the surface of the poem. The narrator intrudes upon the aged eminence of an old Southern manor, where 'Decay was the tone of old brick and shingle,' and knocks on the door

> To beg their dole of a look, in simple charity,
> Or crumbs of legend dropping from their great store.

But he is dismissed by a servant who says the old mistress is ill. As the speaker leaves, he notes:

> How lovingly from my foreign weed the feather curled
> On the languid air; . . .

The narrator takes this to be a token of his own attraction to the crumbling house (the house of the past). The tone of the narration is wryly appraising, an effect achieved by connectives like 'emphatically' to open stanzas, and by a studiously pedantic circumlocution in description, appropriately reflecting the 'tired historian'. Still, we are left with the uncomfortable feeling that the poet is claiming too much for his house of the past. The old manor is not only the repository of a certain not 'ignoble' history, but seems as well to stand for the house of life:

> . . . Your mansion, long and richly inhabited,
> Its exits and entrances suiting the children of men,
> Will not for ever be thus, O man, exhibited,
> And one had best hurry to enter it if one can.

Later, the house appears as the house of Death.

> The old mistress was ill, and sent my dismissal
> By one even more wrappered and lean and dark
> Than that warped concierge and imperturbable vassal
> Who bids you begone from her master's Gothic park.

I like the last two lines very much indeed. They are good lines. They add 'local excitement' to the determinate meaning of the stanza. Still, if the lean dark servant of lines one and two is meant to suggest a minion of the House of Death, what could be that 'Gothic Park' and who could be that 'warped concierge and imperturbable vassal'? Surely, the Gothic Park is the domain of Death from which the live wayfarer is excluded. Why, then, need the servant of line two be 'even more' wrappered and lean and dark than Death's concierge? One concludes that here, as in 'The Tall Girl' the supernatural has got imported into the poem merely because Ransom *believes* it essential in order to adequately 'represent the fulness of the natural.' The result of this importation, in 'Old Mansion', causes a conflict in structure which, at the same time, contributes spuriously to the thickening of the texture. The ambiguity of the house symbol is not a legitimate ambiguity; it clogs rather than opens up new areas of meaning. We feel we have been needlessly mystified with pretentious parlour prestidigitations.

III

When Ransom writes his very best poems (and he has written some of the best poems of his times), he seems to become more careless of the supernatural as representing 'the fullness of the natural.' In 'Janet Waking', 'Blue Girls', 'Antique Harvesters', 'Lady Lost' (to mention only some poems subsequent to those in *Chills and Fever* which also fall into this category of excellence), the myth of the poem is personal, immediate and a genuine function of its structure compounded with its texture.[1] I shall

[1] All of these poems are from *Two Gentlemen in Bonds* (1926), a copy of which I have been unable to secure. A copy is owned by the Congressional Library but was unavailable while this essay was being written. However, my inability to compare the originals with their latest versions would not seem too serious, for Ransom states in the 'Preface' to the *S.P.* that the changes have been made only in 'some of the earlier poems'. These, I take it, would be the poems from *Chills and Fever* (see my discussion above).

consider first 'Lady Lost', then 'Janet Waking', 'Blue Girls', and finally 'Antique Harvesters', Ransom's most distinguished long poem.

'Lady Lost', like 'Janet Waking', fashions a very personal myth out of the particulars of domesticity, in a way which is special to Ransom. The distinctive effect of both these poems is pathos, a pathos all the more poignant for its repression by the fanciful, almost light tone taken toward the object of pathos. Ransom writes with much affection for birds and children.[1] In the first poem, a lost bird assumes the stature of a lost lady; in the second, a dead hen assumes the guise of Death. The gossamer metaphor of 'Lady Lost' would seem to be falsified by paraphrase. A lady bird flies to the poet's birdbath, knocks on the window-pane to be let in from the rain and looks to him as if she would cry. The last two stanzas present the poet's response to her entreaty:

> So I will go out into the park and say
> 'Who has lost a delicate brown-eyed lady
> In the West End section? Or has anybody
> Injured some fine woman in some dark way
> Last night, or yesterday?
>
> 'Let the owner come and claim possession,
> No questions will be asked. But stroke her gently
> With loving words and she will evidently
> Return to her full soft-haired, white-breasted fashion
> And her right home and her right passion.'

The delicate and whimsical charm of this poem (whimsy, that much-maligned mood, has, when properly managed, a legitimate place in the work of the imagination) derives from the complete rightness with which the metaphor is sustained from beginning to end. This rightness, in turn, flows from the correctness of the poet's attitude toward the lady bird which, after all, is the *sina qua non* making the metaphor credible. Such an attitude is possible, perhaps, only in a society where chivalric values regarding women still have some sanction. In an essay 'Forms and Citizens' in *The World's Body*[2] Ransom says in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Baudelaire's 'dandyisme' (as the latter derived it from Joseph De

[1] See 'Old Man Playing with Children' for the first—it is a more complex subject than the title would indicate; for the second, see somewhere 'Is Such a Kingdom'. For a poem about animals see 'Dog', which seems a waste of technique and care on a rather silly situation.

[2] 1938. A collection of criticism, with more practical exercises in the art than are to be found in the two volumes of speculative essays to which I have already referred.

Maistre): 'A natural affiliation binds together the gentlemen, the religious man and the artist—punctilious characters, all of them, in their formalism.' In the same essay, when discussing Eliot's programme, Ransom suggests as substitute: 'In manners, aristocratic; in religion, ritualistic; in art, traditional.' I hardly think this programme explains 'Lady Lost'. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether the special gallantry of the conception could have been possible to one who did not give at least some service to the notion of punctiliousness in manners. For it is the full measure of gentlemanliness which seeks not merely to restore the lost lady to her rightful owner, but also accepts responsibility for instructing him how to treat the creature properly. In this poem the dramatic fable, slight, intimate and original relies on no supernatural structural machinery to blow up the event into 'the fullness of the natural.' The relationships are simple to start with: the poet is appealed to as a protector; the lady bird is in need of help; and they are kept simple throughout the poem. The relationships, I suppose I need not add, are human ones.[1]

'Janet Waking' sets up, like 'Lady Lost' a pathetic dimension. But the pathos is more intense, more 'tragic', perhaps, for the incongruity between Janet's universe of grass and hens and that of death in which she 'would not be instructed . . .' is a paradox basic to the human condition, and not merely to the experience of little girls with dead hens. The convention of the poem suggests the narrator as the father, guardian or friend of Janet. He is clearly moved by her inability to accept the death of Chucky, yet by the distance he keeps from giving expression to this involvement, he controls his own predicament. The measure of his distance is communicated by his manners toward Chucky:

> It was a transmogrifying bee
> Came droning down on Chucky's old bald head
> And sat and put the poison. It scarcely bled
> But how exceedingly
>
> And purply did the knot
> Swell with the venom and communicate
> Its rigor! Now the poor comb stood up straight
> But Chucky did not.

[1] The structure of the poem, four cinquains, riming *abba*, and a preponderance of run-on lines running from two to four lines, gives the poem a fluidity of movement which creates a curious counterpoint to the dramatic structure and the measured colloquialism of the diction. The result is a curious blend of lyric and narrative qualities.

Chucky's death is rightly viewed by the adult narrator as part of the give and take of a 'natural' universe. Nevertheless, while the inexorability of this exchange is humourously understated, its brutality is acknowledged in the short 'But Chucky did not.' And the final stanza completes the evaluation: it becomes clear that the narrator fully accepts the significance of Chucky's death on Janet's terms, terms which are fraught with poignance for all of us:

> And weeping fast as she had breath
> Janet implored us, 'Wake her from her sleep'.
> And would not be instructed in how deep
> Was the forgetful kingdom of death.

In 'Janet Waking', as in 'Lady Lost', the structure is simple. There is no supernatural machinery; and the relationship between Janet and the hen is right because it is a human one; the relationship between the narrator and the hen is right, because he sees the hen as part of a larger scheme of which the human is also a part; and finally, the relationship between the narrator and Janet is right, because while he does not accept her evaluation, he *understands* it.[1]

'Blue Girls', written on one of the oldest poetic themes imaginable, the Horatian *carpe diem*, with an admonitory ending added, is likely to be one of the chief poems by which Ransom's name will continue to be admired. It is clearly obligated to the tradition of the Cavalier descendents of the metaphysicals, more nearly to Herrick, perhaps, than to Carew. The 'metaphysical' manner in conceit, which Ransom can assimilate so successfully, is quite absent here. Instead, the pure lyricism of Cavalier song is adapted to the more colloquial rhetoric of the metaphysicals. The superiority of 'Blue Girls' to hundreds of other graceful poems

[1] Although I think highly of 'Janet Waking' I find I am still bothered by stanza two:

> One kiss she gave to her mother
> Only a small one gave she to her daddy
> Who would have kissed each curl of his shining baby;
> No kiss at all for her brother.

I do not see how this shopworn series of events, or words, rather, strengthens the intention of the poem. Janet is not particularized in her little girlhood by the clichès of curls, kisses and daddy. I suppose there are some words like 'daddy' and 'baby' which, for the moment at least, simply have got to be thrown out of the poetic vocabulary (or, more properly, when used in such familiar conjunctions). If the purpose of this stanza is to build up the fresh secure world of childhood affection, as opposed to the cold world of death which Janet discovers in the next stanza, I can only state my conviction that it fails to accomplish this. I invite some other reader to tell me why.

on the same subject is precisely the purity and elegance of the language as it works against the affectionate address. The poet addresses the blue girls not as a lover, who would seduce them into spending their beauty, but as an older, more knowledgeable person. He urges as a disinterested yet concerned observer:

> Practise your beauty, blue girls, before it fail;
> And I will cry with my loud lips and publish
> Beauty which all our power shall never establish,
> It is so frail.
>
> For I could tell you a story which is true;
> I know a lady with a terrible tongue,
> Blear eyes fallen from blue,
> All her affections tarnished—yet it is not long
> Since she was lovelier than any of you.

The meticulous usage of the verbs 'practise' and 'publish', the use of direct address, the testimony from personal experience as well as the brilliantly 'co-incidental' factor that the tarnished beauty's eyes were blue, in short—the hint of a personal motive on the speaker's part toward the lady who not long since 'was lovelier than any of you,' all this when combined with the detail of the 'terrible tongue' (just as drastic a detail for beauty's degradation as are worms and winding sheets), make 'Blue Girls' one of Ransom's most successful fables.

The structure of 'Blue Girls' is one of simple antithesis. The bitter example of the last stanza collides with the proclaimed graces of the blue girls in the first three. At the same time, the poem also progresses cumulatively. The last stanza climaxes the warnings the poet can offer the blue girls, whom he had begun to admonish even in the first:

> Go listen to your teachers old and contrary
> Without believing a word.

Is it necessary to say that here again the 'myth 'of the poem is a merely human one. 'Beauty which all our power shall never establish' is a recognition of man's inability to stay the hand of time. The verb 'establish' has here the richly ambiguous sense of 'erect' or 'set up' as well as that of 'demonstrate' or 'prove'. While facing up to this human inadequacy, the poet does not resort to the supernatural in the representation of 'the fullness of the natural' (the blue girls). The line of relationship between the

girls' untested beauty and the poet's superior experience of beauty which is frustrated is, again, a human one.

When we come to examine 'Antique Harvesters', along with 'Blue Girls' the most widely anthologized of Ransom's poems, we find a greater machinery of structure operating to combine with the 'local excitements' (texture) of the poem. I do not agree with Robert Penn Warren that Ransom's is a poetry 'purged of merely local excitement'. In Ransom's most successful poems, such as 'Antique Harvesters', there is a perfect interpenetration, working both ways, of structure and texture. The intricacy of this 'compounding' is best understood, if we take apart, to begin with, the paraphrasable core from the local excitements.

The logical structure of 'Antique Harvesters' is introduced by a setting serving as a sort of footnote to the title: 'Scene: Of the Mississippi the bank sinister, and of the Ohio the bank sinister.' At harvest time, in an old land, 'dry, grey and spare' men assemble to gather the corn. They are old men with memories of the heroes who died here, but the young men want none of their 'sable memories'. Then the poet, a privileged rhetorician, steps forth from the group and evokes certain images of the past, like the fox-hunt. He urges the harvesters to 'garner for the Lady' that they may prove themselves men and know their 'Lady's image'. 'The sons of the fathers' must not forsake her if they are told they can prosper better elsewhere. It is true that while their Lady ages, she has not stooped. If we talk of death, let us recognize that in the mortal scheme all life is fragile and dependent on God's vitality.

But merely to extract the 'paraphrasable core' is, as always, to slander the poem. First of all, it is necessary to recognize the rhetorical tone of the whole. Questions, and answers to them, occur in four of the eight stanzas which comprise 'Antique Harvesters'. The tone of the rhetoric shifts from the impassioned forensic of the first four stanzas to the hortatory style of the next three and finally, in the last, to a note of invocation and prayer. From the beginning there is an ambiguity regarding the poet's role in this situation. First, he flatly reports on the setting and the action; then, oracularly, he both asks and answers questions. He announces, for example, at the end of stanza two, in an impersonal construction, that the past has greater vitality than is thought. Suddenly, in the next stanza, he again identifies himself with the

group as their spokesman, using the collective 'we'. He reports fragments of the old men's talk about the heroic past[1]; specifically, this past is the past of the South for the echoes of it are like 'echoes from the horn/of the hunter . . .' Hunting as a symbol for the old South hardly needs comment. But (and here the poet dissociates himself from the group and again becomes omniscient) only the old men nourish these echoes with love. Then, as if interrupting the progress of the harvest, there is introduced a beautiful description of a hunt, one presented with such immediacy as to create some doubt about its past-ness. Or perhaps it is a real hunt, repeating the gracious movement of the past-in-present:

> Here come the hunters, keepers of a rite;
> The horn, the hounds, the lank mares coursing by
> Straddled with archetypes of chivalry;[2]
> And the fox, lovely ritualist, in flight
> Offering his earthly ghost to quarry;
> And the fields themselves to harry.

It is worth noting here how closely the notion of the hunt as ritual corresponds to Ransom's notion of religion as 'existing for the sake of the ritual'. The fox is a 'lovely ritualist'. The hunters exist for the sake of the rite. And, as the fox offers himself to 'quarry' in the service of the ritual, so in the same scheme of intertwining sacrifice, 'the fields, themselves to harry'. The aristocratic past is a formal system of 'degree' (in the Renaissance sense) and interdependent responsibility. But the concrete quality of this past as represented in the hunt is never overtly articulated with the rest of the poem. As if a dream were to be brushed aside, the poet continues:

> Resume, harvesters. The treasure is full of bronze
> Which you will garner for the Lady . . .

In the next stanza, six, the imagery hardens into a frieze-like cast:

> Bare the arm, dainty youths, bend the knees
> Under bronze burdens. And by an autumn tone
> As by a grey, as by a green, you will have known
> Your famous Lady's image; for so have these;

[1] A few years before in 'Blackberry Winter' Ransom had written: 'And all of the wars have dwindled since Troy fell.'

[2] This line in an earlier version reads: 'Under quaint archetypes of chivalry'.

The Lady is, of course, the South. The vaguely religious term suggests the prayer-like tone of adoration implicit in the whole conception of 'Antique Harvesters'.[1] Her aspects are inexhaustible, the poet implies; she can be known in more than one mode. She can be known as well in her old age ('by an autumn tone') as in her innocent youth ('as by a green') or in her gallant maturity ('grey'—the colour of the Confederate uniforms). The visual composition of this stanza presents the youths in a ritualistic formalism of movement: by working the soil, they perform an act of homage. It is a way of knowing their sources, as the fathers have known them.

The seventh stanza urges the young men to reject those who would seek to have them forsake the South, and also appears to make a somewhat adventitious reference to Ransom's sociological distinction between the new culturally impoverished industrial South, and the old aristocratic agrarian South to which he is urging the legitimate heirs to return.

The last stanza, a tender invocation of fealty to the South, achieves a poignant and persuasive authority managed partly by the antique ending of the verbs (ageth, hath, wearieth,) as well as by the syntax of the last two lines in which the earth's dependence on God's will is ignated with the heirs' upon that of the Lady's. The form of this proposition is proverbial and the syntax effectively legislates for our acceptance of it:

> True, it is said of our Lady, she ageth.
> But see, if you peep shrewdly, she hath not stooped;
> Take no thought of her servitors that have drooped,
> For we are nothing; and if one talk of death—
> Why, the ribs of the earth subsist frail as a breath
> If but God wearieth.

'Antique Harvesters' shows Ransom triumphing on purely poetic grounds over his own critical notions concerning poetry and belief. His latest formulation of this problem is to be found in *The New Criticism*.[2] 'I should say', he writes, 'that old science (with gods, demons and Ptolemaic spheres) was poetico-science,

[1] In connection with Ransom's almost mystical faith in the old South, a faith for which he has constructed a very elaborate ideological rationale in his polemical writings on agrarianism (see *I'll Take My Stand* and *Who Owns America*, two symposia to which he has contributed) a sentence from *God Without Thunder* seems apropos: 'It is well to believe a good many things without having to conduct a continuous epistemological discussion about them.'

[2] In an essay on I. A. Richards and in connection with Richard's *Science and Poetry*.

which was available to poetry, and that modern science is pure science, which is not . . .' And later he makes a curious distinction regarding the way this dichotomy works out in practise: '. . . good poets are not like the romantic ones, repeating what they would like to believe but cannot any longer believe . . .' In actuality, the questions which arise about the relationship of poetry and belief do not usually stem from the conflict Ransom has described. That is to say, the conflict is not so much between what the poet would like to and *can* believe, although this sometimes occurs; but here the question is interior to the poet's psychology and *anterior* to his poetry. It is not a question of poetry *versus* belief but what the reader *cannot* and the poet would like him to believe. An example of this would be Pound's Gesellian economics employed as deus ex machina in the *Cantos*. Or, to bring the case more nearly home, Ransom's faith in the superiority of a return to an aristocratic, agrarian, homogeneous Southern economy as opposed to the possible offerings of contemporary pluralistic socio-economic structures. The fact that 'Antique Harvesters' is a plausible, moving poem even for one who, like myself, does not accept the notion of the practicality of a return to a regional agrarian economy proves that a poem *can* triumph over its 'ideas'. Ransom, in it, like the good poet he is, is repeating what he wishes to believe, and believes. The poetic urgency compels the reader to perform an act comparable to a 'willing suspension of disbelief'. Thus, for the *duration of the poem* the poet's version of his experience is entirely congenial to the reader who would reject Ransom's prose polemics.[1] In short, we can consider 'Antique Harvesters' as a conquest of structure by texture. As an aesthetic experience, the poem operates to refute Ransom's critical propositions about the connections between poetry and belief.

[1] I hope this brief discussion of the problem of poetry and belief will not be taken to represent my final view of this, as yet, completely unsettled question. It is my belief that, in spite of the large amount of critical intelligence which has been devoted to this problem in the last two decades, a uniformly satisfactory approach has not been developed. Ransom, himself, further takes up the discussion of poetry and belief in his essay on T. S. Eliot in *The New Criticism*. Eliot is taken to task for waiving the problem of belief in poetry: 'I incline to think that the problem exists in poetry as in religion, and is very nearly the same problem. . . . I can see no necessity for waiving the intellectual standards on behalf of poets.' But Ransom fails to provide any exposition of his inclination. For example, he merely affirms, without proving that Dante's beliefs are 'substantively better grounded' than Shelley's. A non-Catholic atheist (not myself) might wish to argue this point, while conceding the superiority of Dante's poetry. I do not think, that in the long run, Ransom has been very helpful on this troublesome problem. Dr Mills, in the study I have referred to, does not touch on it at all.

IV

The five poems written since 1927 which Ransom has included in *Selected Poems* are too slender evidence on which to generalize his present direction. In subject matter, these poems have little connection. At least two of them have the somewhat concocted look, although expertly so, of 'occasional' poetry. Of these, the 'Address to the Scholars of New England' delivered as the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa Poem in June, 1939, is interesting for its autobiographical witness to the impact of New England myths on the early development of the poet:

> Scared by the holy megrims of those Pilgrims,
> I thought the unhumbled and outcast and cold
> Were rich Heirs travelling incognito,
> Bred too fine for the country's sweet produce
> And but affecting that dog's life of pilgrims.

The other, 'What Ducks Require' is a heightening of Ransom's early humourous vein to a more complexly 'clever' style, while preserving the lightness of tone. The poem is interesting less for its logical structure (a salute to the adventurousness of ducks) than for its interesting linguistic innovations, some aspects of which it shares with the other late poems.

'Of Margaret' is a charming act of elegiac fealty to 'that far-away time of gentleness', when Margaret 'whose generations were of the head' gave the world her maiden pageant. It is, more than any poem in this group, close to Ransom's early poetic diction (in *Chills and Fever*) and to one of his early poetic themes —praise for the dead virgin. The poet, is, however, appreciably mellower toward his subject than in some of the related early poems such as 'Emily Hardcastle, Spinster'.

'Prelude to an Evening' and 'Painted Head' testify to Ransom's close reading of the 'moderns' of whom he had once made the interesting distinction that they wrote two classes of poetry which he described as 'thin, pure' poetry and 'rich, obscure' poetry.[1] Both poems fall into the latter category. They suggest an especially interested study of the work of Wallace Stevens, whom, as a matter of fact, Ransom had classified among those who wrote thin, pure poetry, and that of e. e. cummings, a 'romantic' whose poetics would seem, at first glance, to be the antithesis of

[1] See 'Poets Without Laurels' in *The World's Body*.

Ransom's courtly and somewhat finicky muse. From cummings Ransom has taken the unconventional disposal of adverbs, the attaching of negative prefixes to adjectives and nouns, the compounding of nouns and a general telescoping of syntax.[1] Through Stevens, I imagine, Ransom has developed a respect for free verse (although, he would, perhaps, be the last man to say so) for, in spite of the fact that he arranges his lines in these poems into stanza which look like quatrains, they are unrhymed and follow no traditional metrical scheme. There is an additional echo of Stevens in such charming pastel images as:

> You in your peignoir, dainty at your orange-cup,

and in the phonetic iteration of such word-play as:

> That dreamed and undreamt become each other

while the 'idea' of 'Painted Head' is a Stevens leit-motif:

> . . . Beauty is of body.
> The flesh shallowly on a head
> Is a rock-garden needing body's love
> And best bodiness to colorify[2]

One might even go further and suggest that Ransom has been attentive to some of the innovations of the Surrealists in the denser imagery and phonetic 'suggestiveness' of passages like

> For cry, cock-crow, or the iron bell
> Can crack the sleep-sense of outrage,

The result of Ransom's recent innovations, innovations to be found even in the more 'paraphrasable' 'Address to the Scholars of New England' ('But they reared heads into the always clouds') is a poetry of greater ambiguity. But it would be wrong to assign this effect merely to the technical explorations, when, in fact, the whole 'tenor'[3] of the poems reveals a different approach to the

[1] While all of these practises have long since passed into common use among the moderns, Cummings, by virtue of his persistence, emphasis and age, may be thought of as the source of most of them.

[2] See, for example, Stevens's early and well-known 'Peter Quince at the Clavier' (1916) or his recent *Esthétique du Mal* (1945).

[3] A critical term, Ransom takes over, with qualifications, from I. A. Richards. The weakness of this term, incidentally, is to be seen in a discussion in which Ransom (in *The New Criticism*) takes issue with Richards on an interpretation of a passage from Denham's *Cooper's Hill*. Ransom and Richards, both well-equipped readers, make diametrically opposed assignments of those aspects of the poem which are its 'tenor' (original context) and those which are its 'vehicle' (importation of foreign content). It would seem that a set of terms which offer such resistance to application in a quite simple poem, are surely of questionable serviceability when the critic has to contend with 'obscure' poetry.

'paraphrasable core' than does Ransom's early work. 'Prelude to an Evening' builds up to a fine, rich, vague sense of an unnamed Evil invading the world of two adults from the nether-world of their submerged selves. And the hinted-at sinister doom of the elders in the last stanza begins to infect the world of the 'warm children':

> You like a waning moon, and I accusing
> Our too banded Eumenides
> You shall make Noes but wanderingly,
> Smoothing the heads of the hungry children.

'Painted Head', while indebted to Ransom's early 'metaphysical' body-mind dualism, nevertheless now allows body to triumph in the contest. Stanza one proclaims the status of the head, and clearly shows an obligation to cummings's diction:[1]

> By dark severance the apparition head
> Smiles from the air a capital on no
> Column or a Platonic perhaps head
> On a canvas sky depending from nothing;

Stanzas five and six develop this essential anti-Platonism into a Stevens-like consideration of the paradoxical but inevitable opposition of the imagination and the 'actual'. There are some autobiographic penitences to be sensed here as well:

> So that the extravagant device of art
> Unhoused by abstraction this once head
> Was capital irony by a loving hand
> That knew the treason of a head like this;
>
> Makes repentance in an unlovely head
> For having vinegarly traduced the flesh
> Till, the hurt flesh recusing, the hard egg
> Is shrunken to its own deathlike surface;

V

A few final comments on the quality of Ransom's poetic vision would seem to be in order. The totality of Ransom's tone, like the totality of Eliot's, would seem to suggest a poetry of failure. Irony, in both Ransom and Eliot, is an instrument for the assimilation and the ordering of failure into an endurable scheme

[1] The metrical variations Ransom works on the iambic base of these 'free-verse' lines are most interesting.

of existence. Ransom's irony, professedly derived from the seventeenth century metaphysicals, and especially that of Donne, has, nevertheless, a very personal cast which is difficult to describe. One way to get at it might be to say that Ransom has the irony without passion of Donne. Or, to put it differently, Ransom would appear to have made an eighteenth century neo-classical addition to his metaphysical sources. One measure of Ransom's great distance from Donne and Marvell is to be seen in his love poems. In the best of Donne and Marvell the convention is for the narrator to be the lover. This method is adopted by Ransom in very few poems, and the reason would seem to be that he is more outside the experience of love, judging it, as I have pointed out, like an omniscient spectator even in those poems where he permits himself first-person involvement. This rigorous elimination of the poet's 'personality' is something that Ransom has, no doubt, deliberately sought. His essay on *Lycidas*[1] suggests such an objective. The goal of the poet, Ransom here urges, should be a perfect anonymity. Milton's poetry breaks down, he asserts, precisely at those points where we come too close to the man, himself. Paradoxically, however, Ransom in his own poems has not been able to fully eradicate 'personality', while doing everything poetically possible to inhibit it. That is to say, while he has successfully eliminated passion, he has nevertheless left the distinctive mark of an odd, intense and dryly fine wit on everything he has touched.

We must face, then, the fact that Ransom's generous wish for 'a totality of experience' in poetry, breaks down in his own practise to mean a totality of experience relevant to this particular 'structure'. And it is precisely at this point where the critical misunderstandings of Ransom's significance enter. For while Ransom's 'structures' are, on the whole, quite narrow segments of 'reality', his experience of them is not. His poetry, it seems to me, represents the triumph of a richly plastic sensibility over an essentially small stock of 'ideas' or 'structures'.

[1] See 'A Poem Nearly Anonymous' in *The World's Body*.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ROBERT PENN WARREN

FREDERICK BRANTLEY

> Solution, perhaps, is public, despair personal,
> But history held to the breath clouds like a mirror.
> —'Pursuit'

Our debt to T. S. Eliot, it has been remarked, is irredeemable because he made the heroic choice to undertake the burden of our common guilt. A reading of the three novels and collected poems of Robert Penn Warren will suggest that his position is somewhat analogous. This is not to cast Warren in the role of prophet, seer or ordained priest, a role that surely would not match his aesthetic or his literary code. Yet Warren, as he is in the pristine sense a religious and moral writer, has worked directly towards the centre of the 'modern problem', the fundamental nature of our guilt. The probing of that cancerous tissue is done solely in terms of imagery and dramatic situation. Even Warren's attitude to the craft of poetry reflects one facet—the deathly divorce between metaphor and statement—of the disintegration theme; for his poetry is dedicated to the wedding of concept and image. Shying from abstract analysis of the conflicts within the world, he has approached his material in the structural terms of tragedy. In this he shares a task with Joyce, Hardy, Faulkner, Melville and Conrad, to name a few of that group (smaller than we think) of writers in English who, at various periods since 1700, have striven to illuminate the tragic experience by presenting it imaginatively in the light of the conflict of self, the private struggle in a world of public action to achieve self-definition. Warren's form is the tragedy, and the vision that informs and bloods the drama (for his method is invariably dramatic rather than discursive) is a stark but sympathetic one of the 'divided man'.

It is not extravagant to cite the kinship of Warren's insight to those concepts of man and of the nature of his will which were basic to the full-bodied achievements of the Elizabethan or Jacobean dramatists. Even in Shakespeare we find no firmer realization of the personal, inner division that seemed to doom the

hero to a certain, if magnificent, downfall. The tragedy of Brutus, for example, is grounded upon his lack of self-knowledge, a personal failure that confesses itself, or we might say objectifies itself, in the artificial split that he makes between the world of motive and the world of action. His pathetic and tragic behaviour from the first act onwards is his struggle to bridge the abyss between the two, to attain that integration and fulfilment he describes so sympathetically. Viewed in this light, the irony of Brutus' tediously correct definitions of honour is brutal. In Warren's second novel, *At Heaven's Gate*, one of the characters, a Baudelairean young poet-boxer, explains the tragic flaw of the Shakespearean hero as a defect of self-knowledge. It is one of the many overt indications of Warren's attachment to this particular psychological and moral situation.

The torsions of political philosophy, metaphysics, economy and morality, by which we recognize the Renaissance as a historical period, were felt by the Elizabethans as sometimes ambiguous but always vivifying pressures. What they so sensitively perceived as the encroaching changes in man's philosophical definition of himself has had time to reveal its form more clearly in present day assumptions of the limits of knowledge, or the place of the individual. Many modern thinkers start with a definition that is no longer of man as being, but of man as function. All of us who have read the contemporary social satirists know that little suburbanite who wallows in one sin, *acedia*, spiritual sloth. Although acutely aware of that Renaissance dead-end product, Warren is not content to simply finger-point and satirize, possibly because he clings essentially to the doctrine that man is not a product of history but a creator of history. Or, perhaps, something of a mixture of the two. If he sees modern man as the individual measured out irrevocably among various functions, without an unwavering image of himself by which he may maintain unity of being, Warren also sees the modern as one who cannot make a satisfying creative association between himself and his acts of yesterday. His narrative is, among other things, the story of human effort to come to some enrichening relationship with history, with the past.

In the novel *All the King's Men*, published in 1946, we find Warren's central themes expressed in an ambitious and important narrative that is as implicit in meaning and violent in fable as an

Elizabethan play. The novel, significantly enough, is not of one 'hero' but of several, for the most obvious quality of its characters is their sense of incompleteness. On the level of surface action, the narrative covers the rise and fall of an American, grassroot, political dictator.[1] Willie Stark climbs, by dint of his dynamic will to action, up from a naïve and idealist backwoods figure to become the ruthless governor of a Southern state. Like Cassius, he thinks he possesses one virtue (but it is a virtue that will not alone complete his personality): he has resolution.

Stark is opposed to the traditionalist and the idealist for he has adopted an attitude towards the past that allows him only one interpretation of it: the past only hides every man's legal or public mistake. Sleuth through any man's past and the dossier is excellent material for blackmail, and so becomes an effective weapon in the hands of a man who is wholly devoted to the values of pure action and to his image of the future. Or, as Stark himself so pithily defines the meaning of the past: 'Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud. There is always something.' Stark's is not the ambivalent position (at least at first Stark would not have it to be) of the 'lean men', the speakers in the poem 'History Among the Rocks' who, casting backward in memory to a specific violent moment in history, muse:

> Their reason is hard to guess, remembering
> Blood on their black mustaches in moonlight.
> Their reason is hard to guess and a long time past:
> The apple falls, falling in the quiet night.

Intermeshed with Stark, in the scene and fable of the novel, are several characters who arise from a background that is traditional, but theirs is a position close to paralysis of tradition, remindful of the lines from the poem 'History': 'Our thews . . . latched in the myth's langour,/Our hearts with fable grey.' Adam

[1] A wry comment upon present-day ability to read Tragedy, most of the profesional reviewers read (if that word may be used) the novel solely as biography. The model, to them, was obviously the late Huey Long; and so the question was why didn't Mr Warren faithfully reproduce the specific, historical details. Why didn't he simply write out the trite, ineffectual, editorial castigation of Long and let the whole matter go at that? As Robert B. Heilman pointed out, in a brilliant essay upon the novel and its reviewers, the moral reading of man contained in *All the King's Men* is implicit and its definition of Evil is complicated. With the possibilities for the cataloguing of man punctured, it is small wonder that those hot for certainty but with a distaste for the painful ambiguity of the road to knowledge would be upset.

Stanton, the extreme idealist and naïve Platonist, is committed blindly to the Idea and upon the surface is unaware that he is seeking his complement in Stark, the man of Fact. A young doctor, Stanton joins with Stark in planning and building a state charity hospital that shall be dedicated to giving relief to all men. Stanton's sister Anne seeks out Stark finally because she finds in him an ability to marshall facts, to move directly in a line of action that does not waver nor in a large sense make compromises. Although the drive of the characters is their impulse towards completion, the irony does not rest alone on a simple contrast of these antithetical poles of the human status. Stark, for example, despite his apparent acclimatization to the world of immediate facts, is subtly duped by his conviction that the act may be pure. He is almost unconsciously pushing towards self-knowledge. His accommodation of 'evil' had been false: minor incidents of human corruption are merely necessary oil to the political machinery. Later, in insisting that the construction of the state hospital be entirely devoid of bribery, of political use, he is repudiating his earlier 'the end justifies the means' rationalization. And he is in a sense indicating his need for a value he associates with a sense of tradition. Stark's tragedy is that the realization comes too late; a whole commitment to a working half-truth such as his carries the seeds of eventual paralysis. His effort to establish an idea of continuity—although he conceives this continuity only in terms of the future: the hospital as monument, his devotion to a worthless son who himself ends paralyzed by an accidental injury—is doomed. Stanton, on the other hand, driven to an introversion that is self-destructive, cannot accept any of the soiled conditions that action imposes; he would rather destroy the world, an impulse inevitably translated into suicide. Stark's assassination by Stanton symbolically merges the two sides of man which have been falsely split asunder.

The narrator of the violent story of Stark, Adam Stanton and Anne, is Jack Burden, a young ex-student of history, who, out of his rootlessness, attaches himself to Governor Stark. Burden's corner of grace is that he can still question the grounds upon which the motives of the world around him are based. In his search for explanations, especially for descriptions of his moral (or amoral) position in the universe, he passes from a Platonism (which emphasizes only the necessitarian aspects) to a pragma-

tism, to mechanism, to an eventual realization that for the proper inner harmony of man there must be a union of his idealist and pragmatic desires. Out of such union will come salvation. What Burden 'learns' from the tragic events he witnesses is that the man of idea and the man of fact 'were doomed to destroy each other, just as each was doomed to try to use the other and to yearn toward and try to become the other, because each was incomplete with the terrible division of their age'. But it is not a pre-determined division; Stark's last comment is that 'all could have been different' and Burden finally sees that in respect to the moral neutrality of history, 'History is blind, but man is not.' In Warren's words, the characters live 'in the agony of their will'. They must, if there is to be progression toward (or inner vision of) the individual self as the complete man. Burden's (and the name is meaningful) awful experience of responsibility is that he has seen the split—the crime of man partaking of only one part of his nature, of living by half-truth—and like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner he must retell the story of the Fall and symbolically recreate the strife and the effort (for the very process is of final importance) of man to gain personal integration.

Burden undergoes an excrutiatingly long and torturous period of barrenness, of life without faith, and the action of the novel explores in an intensely exciting and illuminating way the many grounds upon which his cynicism rests. We remember the Mariner must drink of his own blood to regain the power of communication, that he, too, cannot pray, for a 'wicked whisper came, and made/My heart as dry as dust.' The 'wicked whispers' that Burden knows are capable of much variation and each, incidentally, is an intellectual strategy to avoid the responsibility of personal and private choice, to avoid the problem of free-will.

The reference to Coleridge's great poem, a poem that may well focus the whole nature of the philosophic conflict of the nineteenth century and of modern man, is not a mere passing one. Warren's method is similar—Burden takes the place of the narrator of Coleridge's poem—and the ultimate conclusions as to the place of Evil in the universe bear remarkable similarities. Warren publicly indicates his attachment to Coleridge's insight and position in his recent, book-length study of that poem and calls attention to the import of Coleridge's statement quoted in *Table Talk*: 'A fall of some sort or the other—the creation, as

it were, of the non-absolute—is the fundamental postulate of the moral history of Man. Without this hypothesis, Man is unintelligible; with it every phenomenon is explicable.' If it is knowledge of the full implication of Original Sin that the Mariner gains, it is a closely allied knowledge that Burden ultimately receives. Expressed in the words of the 'religious fanatic' at the close of *All the King's Men*, this solution of the eternal paradox of imperfection created by perfection receives Burden's assent:

> The creation of man whom God in His foreknowledge knew doomed to sin was the awful index of God's omnipotence. For it would have been a thing of trifling and contemptible ease for Perfection to create mere perfection. To do so would, to speak truth, be not creation but extension. Separateness is identity and the only way for God to create, truly create, man was to make him separate from God Himself, and to be separate from God is to be sinful. The creation of evil is therefore the index of God's glory and His power. That had to be so that the creation of good might be the index of man's glory and power. But by God's help. By His help and in His wisdom.

In his own way Burden does believe this. And the belief is one that prepares him to 'go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time'.

Some account then of Original Sin (although the moderns, by evading the issue of the psychic event, may have alienated the term from its full meaning) must be made before the sacramental quality of the universe may be apprehended. Warren's own interpretation of Coleridge's depiction of such a process is relevant: 'Original Sin is not hereditary sin; it is original with the sinner and is of his will. There is no previous determination of the will, for the will exists outside the chain of cause and effect, which is of Nature and not of Spirit. And as for the time of this act of sin, he [Coleridge] says that the "subject stands in no relation to time, can neither be in time nor out of time". The bolt whizzes from the crossbow and the bird falls . . . .' Like the Mariner, Burden has committed the crime (or seen into the common crime of his age) and his expiation is his final ability to bless, to accept the past. Also like the Mariner, he feels the necessity to retell his story of crime and expiation. Burden resembles the *poete maudit*, the crucible that undergoes the eternal crime of man and of his pride, who symbolically fulfils the destiny of man. Thus Burden, at the

close of the novel, is re-establishing the state of human communion; but, as an effect of his experience and insight, he is slightly apart from the world of men.

All the King's Men brings together in a richly detailed and elaborated form all of the themes that have been consistently developed in the growing body of Warren's works. *Night Rider*, his first novel, is, in simplified terms, the story of a man alienated from both the public world and himself. The protagonist is fated to the search for self-knowledge, but the career of his search is marked by false clues and false private estimations. He reaches a spiritual sterility through his desperate decision to take the way of self-negation. Operating with a narrative of the open and secret warfare between an association of tobacco farmers and the companies who hold a tobacco monopoly, Warren has traced the ironic contrasts between his protagonist's attempts to define himself in the public act and to define his inner, individual being. There are far more than echoes of *Julius Caesar* in the theme, and in the human situations that dramatize the theme of this novel. *At Heaven's Gate*, published in 1943, approaches in sometimes explicit terms the theme of the meaning of history, reflecting the modern frustration by its intricately developed 'search for the father image' motif. The significant contribution of this novel is its penetration into the ways in which the past may go empty or become devoid of power to shape immediacy and future. The persistent motif of the *alter ego* figures largely in *At Heaven's Gate*: the *alter ego* sometimes a process forming an integral part of self-knowledge, sometimes a method for reaching it. The theme of the *alter ego* links with the characters' vacillation between complete rejection of the past and acceptance of unworkable, artificial symbols for it. Miss Irene Hendry, in an acute essay upon the two early novels, succinctly defines the 'sin' of Warren's characters: 'The Biblical sin of father-rejection, simultaneously the psychological sin of rejecting self-definition, is the sin of a number of Warren's characters.'

It seems almost commonplace to point out that an artist with such a seriously considered theme must return consistently to that large vision in all his writings, whatever the form in which he undertakes them. General recognition of Warren's talent and importance was accorded first to his poetry. *Selected Poems*, 1923–43 brought together the poet's choice of his work from

two earlier volumes, plus his selection of the poems that have been published in periodicals since 1940. He is apparently an acutely self-critical and exacting writer, as may be attested by the number of revisions and omissions from the complete folio of his poems. Like other members of the group with whom he is usually identified—especially Ransom and Tate—he possesses a fine awareness of style, not as a deadening preoccupation with copy-book forms, but as a determinant of the meaning of the poem.

The beginning of his literary career is marked by precocity in that, when he was a youthful undergraduate at Vanderbilt University, he joined the group—Tate, Ransom, Merrill Moore, Donald Davidson, Laura Riding, Andrew Lytle, Herbert Agar, F. L. Owsley—who were to name themselves the Southern Agrarians or, with particular reference to their literary interests and beliefs, the Fugitives. This group, centred during the 1920's at Nashville, Tennessee, expressed their common political and cultural commentary upon the contemporary social scene in two volumes of collected essays: *I'll Take My Stand* and *Who Owns America?* The cause of the agrarian society was generally supported. In obeisance to most of the contributor's specific regional background, many of the essays were shrewd studies of traditional social values which the Southern region of the United States had had at one time, or still retained in vestigial form. Contrary to many of their critics during the early 1930's—who perhaps wished to slur over the group's attack upon industrialism—the literary interest maintained by the Agrarians in Southern history was not of a sentimental fashion. The distinction was between the Southern way of life as against the so-called 'American way' or the way of industrial exploitation of human faculties. It posed humanistic belief against blind faith in a misunderstood 'scientific method'. Support of a basically religious value may be perceived in the brief comment from the 'Statement of Principles' of *I'll Take My Stand*: 'But nature industrialized, transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities, is no longer nature but a highly simplified picture of nature. We receive the illusion of having power over nature, and lose the sense of nature as something mysterious and contingent.'

The Agrarian movement, perhaps partly because most of the members of this nucleus were either literary or academic, did not reach fruition in an open, polling-booth to polling-booth political

movement. Nor, indeed, did the group pretend that they would be able to furnish the brass-knuckles and clubs to be used in hand-to-hand, Agrarian-versus-Industrialist warfare. A power-bloc in the Democratic party was not achieved; there was no wholesale bolt from the party to form a new or third one. Summarily, if the word be used in its broadest sense, the movement was a concerted consideration of the religious problem in the modern world. In their literary activity, several members of the group were to furnish much of the significant investigation of the similitude, as to function and value, of the roles of religion and poetry.

A note on Warren's contribution to *I'll Take My Stand* may be of interest in the light of my previous discussion of his fiction. His essay in that volume was upon the problem of the Negro in the South, and in it the crux of the solution offered is the necessity for the Negro to come to a sustaining pride in himself as Negro (to avoid false self-definition) rather than to accept a solution haphazardly motivated by a desire not to be equal but to be 'white'.

In 1925, at the age of nineteen, Warren joined the editorial staff of *The Fugitive*, the small literary magazine published by the group that was to play an important part in the American literary renaissance of the 1920's. In the brief span of that magazine's existence, it was to print poetry by such writers as Allen Tate, Hart Crane, John Crowe Ransom, Laura Riding, Robert Graves, John Gould Fletcher, and several of Warren's earliest poems. Even from the strenuously culled early poems that appear in *Selected Poems* it is evident that as early as *The Fugitive* days he was preoccupied with various elements of the gigantic theme we later see embodied with all its multiple and varied implications in the novels and more recent poems.

Warren's poetic method is basically one of irony and understatement, the oblique direction into the poem's meaning. He has learned much from Metaphysical poetry (particularly Marvell's) and in two poems, 'The Garden' and 'Love's Parable', he gives us what amounts to a powerful and humble dedication to it. The poems are Marvellian, but, as sign of Warren's gifts, the poetic devices and the imagistic tone are assimilated into an effective and individual whole. They achieve what is probably genuine originality. Warren, in 'The Garden', even restates the haunting and favourite Marvellian ambiguity (the terrible, simultaneous

existence of man's desire for peace and desire for the satiation of his physical longings):

> Only for him these precincts wait
> In sacrament that can translate
> All things that fed luxurious sense
> From appetite to innocence.

Many of the poems, one might say, are explorations of the problem of knowledge. They receive much of their force from the ironic contrast between the purity of experience and man's commentary upon it. This leads into one of the large themes of the poetry. Man is constantly relating himself to Nature, but man's peculiar position is that, if only by his ability to suffer regret and attempt definition, he is over and above Nature. The barb is that regret is always linked with the act and, though he may slothfully desire 'the sweet sterility of stone', he must always face the sense of the tragic, which is 'natural' to him. The more or less ambivalent position of man, with his responsible *human* role in the universe, may often cause him to long for the 'innocence' and peace of nature (to reject the responsibility of his will and pride). This is the issue of much of the quality of paradox and irony to be found in the statement and imagery of Warren's poetry.

An extremely early poem, 'The Return: An Elegy', will illustrate this pervasive ambiguity. The poem is not the traditional or conventional elegy; it is actually about the inability of the protagonist to achieve a formal and perhaps sanctimonious expression of sorrow. His mind runs over his past, but what unfalteringly swims up are the bawdy associations as well as the blasphemous:

> give me the nickels off your eyes
> from your hands the violets
> let me bless your obsequies
> if you possessed conveniently enough three eyes
> then I could buy a pack of cigarettes

and they are destructive of the purity of sorrow which he would like to have. Also, he constantly refers the significance of the mother's death to the monotonous cyclic persistence of nature. Even the *leit-motif* of guilt that threads through the protagonist's mind is couched in such terms:

> the old bitch is dead
> what have I said!
> I have only said what the wind said
> wind shakes a bell the hollow head

In the progress of the poem, the protagonist shifts the term of reference to the mother to 'the old fox', and thus, while pointing to the elusiveness of meaning of the mother, renews the attempt to place her in the world of nature. Torn between two definitions of death—the natural or scientific one and the human—he is left with only his tense need for *human* expression of the sorrow. But the final comment of the poem is charged with an ironic reference to the conflict of his own attitudes carried by the particular image drawn out of nature:

> If I could pluck
> Against the dry essential of tomorrow
> To lay upon the breast that gave me suck
> Out of the dark the dark and swollen orchid of this sorrow.

It is a kind of spiritual stasis, the personal despair of resolution, to which Warren keeps returning in his poems. We are the ones 'adept, too late, at the art of tears', and 'our courage, perhaps needs new definition'. The difficult knowledge, though, is that we keep coming up with only questions, not answers, that

> All flower from the stalk, and bend,
> Like you, with what beseeching hand.

Or, as in 'Monologue At Midnight', it turns upon that central question:

> And which am I and which are you?
> And are we Time who flee so fast,
> Or stone who stand, and thus endure?

and the answer is the difficulty, expense, and irrationality of 'hope':

> Our mathematic yet has use
> For the integers of blessedness:
> Listen! the poor deluded cock
> Salutes the coldness of no dawn.

The questions are of a pattern with man's continual pursuit of 'happiness'—'Happiness: what the heart wants. That is its fond/ Definition, and wants only peace in God's eye.' Yet the 'pursuit' often follows devious and misleading ways—faith in the doctor's diagnosis, change of scene, change of love, attachment to the person shunned by society, an attempt to recapture childhood, even personal isolation—and one is left with no closer knowledge of

the secret of others' 'wisdom and pleasures' than a teasing glimpse which ' . . . like a fawn/That meets you a moment, wheels, in imperious innocence is gone'. What is missing from the picture is the sure understanding of the private self. The only dignity is the 'pomp of pain' which one may witness in others and which stands to confute and confound until 'you feel like one who has come too late, or improperly clothed, to a party'. And the poem 'Pursuit' offers no unearned solution of the trial of confusion, of nothingness, except again the presence of the luring and intangible symbol of hope:

> She blinks and croaks, like a toad or a Norn, in the horrible light,
> And rattles her crutch, which may put forth a small bloom, perhaps white.

The modern situation, perhaps; but it would be better to say the human situation. The tortures suffered by these people are those of the 'lightly damned': 'born to no adequate definition of terror', unable to act, envying the warmth which the overt criminal has, knowing 'our good action by good will marred. . . .' Indeed, our damnation is that we have no full consciousness of damnation. 'Original Sin: A Short Story' compares it to a nightmare that 'stumbles past, and you have heard/It fumble your door before it whimpers and is gone.' And there is something a bit pathetic and forlorn about a sense of crime, so drowsily recognized, that

> . . . it stood so imbecile,
> With empty hands, humble, and surely nothing in pocket:
> Riding the rods, perhaps—or grandpa's will paid the ticket.

The poem reminds us, however, that nothing we ever have or do is ever lost, and this fact we do come to understand. It continues:

> But it never came in the quantum glare of sun
> To shame you before your friends, and had nothing to do
> With your public experience or private reformation:

If this determinant of our being which so persistently *pursues* us, as we hollowly repeat the scramble from one novelty to another in the realm of physical experience, is something we may call 'original sin', then we should learn that it has no part in the erection of abstract rules of conduct, of the mere forms of religion. To institutionalize is to rationalize the loss, but it is not the complete or wholly satisfying insight.

So tantalizing is the sense of the innate crime that one may not find it when one hearkens back to childhood (childhood as the lost innocence is a haunting preoccupation of the damned) though one's memory of it may be powerful and disturbing:

> Never met you in the lyric arsenical meadows
> When children call and your heart goes stone in the bosom;
> At the orchard anguish never, nor ovoid horror,
> Which is furred like a peach or avid like the delicious plum.

New innocence won't work; the longing for it is contradictory to an essential of salvation, awareness of personal continuity. So the thing which pursues—your crime and well-planted individuality —becomes almost like a child's toy or bauble:

> But it has not died, it comes, its hand childish, unsure,
> Clutching the bribe of chocolate or a toy you used to treasure.

The state of all those implied (and that is a world) by the poem's rhetorical *you* is that partly described by the medievalists as the opposite of spiritual pride, spiritual sloth. In the end, after one tries all the solutions that circumvent self-definition,

> It tries the lock; you hear, but simply drowse:
> There is nothing remarkable in that sound at the door.

or you may be only mildly conscious as

> Later you may hear it wander the dark house
> Like a mother who rises at night to seek a childhood picture;
> Or it goes to the backyard and stands like an old horse cold in
> the pasture.

Warren extends the same subject in the sequence of poems 'Mexico Is a Foreign Country: Five Studies in Naturalism'. In 'The Mango on the Mango Tree', one of that sequence, the subject is the terrible separateness and the common guilt of the universe; the crime, however, is the act by God, 'the Great Schismatic', who has divided form from form as He has man from man. Man does not understand the mango's crime,

> But what to His were ours, who pay,
> Drop by slow drop, day after day,
> Until His monstrous, primal guilt be washed away.

The protagonist of the poem has found the beautiful explanation of the cause behind the fact that 'we share our guilt in decent secrecy': God works the 'Roman plan,/Divide and rule.' Musing upon this, he thinks how easy it would be to lift the 'Babel curse'; merely find and utter the word *forgive*

> And I could leap and laugh and sing
> And it could leap, and everything
> Take hands with us and pace the music in a ring.

The garden of love *before* creation. The poem qualifies that garden, and it takes an astringent tone towards that worthless coin, the pleasant idea of an easy return to it, for it ends with a sharp qualification of that particular state of blessedness: '—Blest in that blasphemy of love we cannot now repeat.' Why *blasphemy*? Because this was love before separation from God, and in relationship to the love which we may achieve, the protagonist may ironically deem it irreligious with a vengeance. First *learn* our separateness and the true act of love is possible; revelation of imperfection and separation is the most sacred knowledge. Or, as in 'Revelation', a poem whose particulars concern the incident of a child's trivial yet seemingly harsh act to his mother, the child breaches the chain he had thought eternal between himself and another, and his discovery will be that 'In separateness only does love learn definition'. Later, in reflecting upon this childish moment of rash insistance upon his sad singularity,

> He would think, than Sulla more fortunate, how once he had learned
> Something important about love, and about love's grace.

Yet so often Warren's portrait of the protagonist or society is of those still close to wallowing in 'The unaimed faceless appetite of dream.' These can only 'envy the mad killer'; in sleepiness they sleep apart from their very selves, while

> The cold heart heaves like a toad, and lifts its brow
> With that bright jewel you have no use for now;
> While puzzled yet, despised with the attic junk, the letter
> Names over your name, and mourns under the dry rafter.

The way out, the awakening and the solution, is no cheap gift; and in Warren's poetry the quality of hope and expiation is not unearned for he tersely describes it:

> Light; the groaning stair; the match aflame;
> The Negro woman's hand, horned gray with cold,
> That lit the wood—oh, merciless great eyes
> Blank as the sea—

These, like 'muffled voices', shall 'bespeak us yet for time and hope'. Dante Alighieri perceived well the infinite complexity of damnation, and from Dante's lines in *Purgatorio* Warren draws the epigraph of *All the King's Men*: 'By curse of theirs man is not so lost, that eternal love may not return, so long as hope retaineth aught of green.'

So brief and simplified an account of the focal patterns of meaning in both Warren's novels and poems must necessarily do an injustice to the many ramifications of his themes; but even a thumb-nail account should have pointed out several thematic links among his various productions. A minimizing description of what we may term the key 'ideas' of his work must lose just acknowledgement of the richness and inventiveness of reference by which Warren has given body to his large but focused writings. This is neither the proper time nor place to attempt to place Warren in any hierarchy of major or minor writers. In fact, it is much too early to render a final evaluation of his achievement. He is still a young and vigorous artist—one might say a member of the 'second generation' of modern poets. It remains to be seen what further fablelization of the modern theme he may give us, to what extent he may succeed in wholly recapturing for the literate of our time a sense of tragedy. In the meantime the ambitiousness and accomplishment of his prose and poetry demand that we read him with the entirety of our faculties, compel us, if we are honest, to take the long look. If good poetry gives us knowledge, it is not a generalization by which we may run from ourselves, but the path by which we return to that sometimes overwhelming human task, private understanding.

IMAGISM: A RECONSIDERATION

B. RAJAN

AN article on Imagism can claim to be doubly justified in any symposium on modern American poetry. The movement assembled, particularly in its criticism, many of the tendencies which went to make up the 'Poetic Renaissance' and is consequently often discussed in detail in academic histories of the period. But it is also notable for a different reason; it is perhaps the only movement with a wide American influence, to have had English practitioners and an English following. Having said this much one is compelled to add, that the intrinsic importance of Imagism cannot now be considered very great. It produced a small amount of competent minor poetry, engaged the interests of Ezra Pound for a few years and helped to disseminate some ideas of T. E. Hulme. But it had nothing positive to say which was not said far better in the early poetry of Eliot. And the mannerisms of the school, its restricted range, its decorative monotony, its failure to utilize the resources of language make it difficult to realize that it was once radical and *avant garde* and a cause for consternation in academic America.

Some such movement of technical innovation as Imagism however, seems necessary at the beginning of a new literary period. The reformation of style has usually to precede the deeper reformation of the sensibilities which create style. 'Every revolution' in poetry says Eliot 'is apt to be and sometimes to announce itself as, a return to common speech. That is the revolution which Wordsworth announced in his prefaces and he was right: but the same revolution had been carried out a century before by Oldham, Waller, Denham and Dryden; and the same revolution was due over again something over a century later.'[1] After the excesses of poetic diction in the late nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth it was certainly necessary for the good health of poetry to advocate a return to common speech. But there are many ways of achieving this return and the way Imagism proposes is unfortunately not the right one. It is necessary to insist

[1] 'The Music of Poetry', *Partisan Review*, Nov.-Dec. 1942, p. 457.

on this criticism because of the prevalent superstition that the theories of Imagism were sound but their execution inadequate and that the failure of the movement can be attributed almost entirely to the lack of genius among the poets who composed it. Edwin Muir claims for instance that the theory of Imagism was 'insufficient though salutary' and goes on to contrast its practice as 'constricting'.[1] Herbert Read argues that 'though attempts have been made to create an "imagist" poetry directly under the influence of Hulme's theories, and though these attempts have been of great value in the introduction of a clearer tone into poetic expression, they have remained comparatively obscure because they have not been the vehicle of any momentous intelligence. That does not alter the validity of the ideas or the possibility of their general application'.[2] I hope this essay will succeed in demonstrating that doctrines as barren as those of Imagism could not have been the vehicle of any 'momentous intelligence' and that the failure of the movement is consequently one of teaching as well as of talent. A reconsideration of Imagism is nevertheless justified because by uncovering its critical shortcomings, and the effect of those shortcomings on its poetic practice, one is able to define one's own position by dissent and to give that dissent an historical validity. A movement may be important to the literary critic for the negative but still significant reason that it has led to important and influential mistakes.

The history of Imagism has been conveniently summarized by F. S. Flint.[3] Hulme is apparently to be regarded as its father though his poems appeared in no Imagist anthology. His meeting with Flint early in 1909 led to the formation of a 'dining-and-talking society' which held its first meeting on March 25th. Pound joined the society in April, a week after the publication of *Personae*, and was the first to attach the label *Imagisme* to the poetic theories of the group. The society dissolved in 1911 but 1912 saw the publication of Hulme's 'Collected Poems'—all five of them—as a supplement to Ezra Pound's *Ripostes*. In January of the same year Harold Monro opened the Poetry Bookshop in London, and in October Harriet Monroe published the first issue of *Poetry* in Chicago. Three poems by Aldington appeared in the November

[1] 'The Present Age', *Introductions to English Literature*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (London, 1939), Vol. V, p. 51.
[2] Intro. to T. E. Hulme's 'Notes on Language and Style', *The Criterion*, July 1925.
[3] 'The History of Imagism', *The Egoist*, May 1st, 1915.

number, and three by H.D. in the following January. The March issue included the first public statement of Imagist principles by Pound, over the signature of F. S. Flint. Pound also contributed 'A Few Dont's by an Imagiste'. Publication in England proved more difficult but the founding of *Poetry and Drama* by Harold Monro in March 1913 provided limited facilities. The magazine only survived till December 1914 but eleven months earlier *The New Freewoman* had been transformed into *The Egoist*, and, Aldington installed as an associate editor. *The Egoist* was to be the chief organ of Imagism in England, a similar service being performed in America by *Poetry* and by *The Little Review*. With the publication of the first Imagist anthology in March 1914 Imagism began to be respectable and Pound's interest in it began, characteristically, to wane. 'Imagism', he told Glenn Hughes 'was a point on the curve of my development. Some people remained at that point. I moved on.'[1] He moved on to Vorticism and the violences of *Blast*. Meanwhile Imagism had discovered a fairy godmother in the ample person of Miss Amy Lowell, a writer whose poetic talents were inconsiderable but whose entrepreneurial abilities were immense. On July 17th, 1914, Miss Lowell invited her dazzled associates to what is reverentially known as the 'Imagist Dinner'. The menu, preserved for us by the devotion of Professor Hughes, is far more impressive than any Imagist poem.[2] The result of this ceremony was the appearance in 1915 of *Some Imagist Poets* the first of three Imagist anthologies issued annually up to 1917. A fourth anthology, published in 1930, was little more than a nostalgic retrospect. The 1915 collection is the most important for our purposes since it is prefaced by that celebrated manifesto from which all discussions of the movement begin. It is a manifesto which has been misunderstood and mangled often enough to deserve the courtesy of extensive quotation.

> The poets in this volume do not represent a clique. Several of them are personally unknown to the others, but they are united by certain common principles arrived at independently. These principles are not new; they have fallen into desuetude. They are the essentials of all great poetry, indeed of all great literature, and they are simply these:

[1] Glenn Hughes, *Imagism and the Imagists* (Stanford University, 1931), p. 38.
[2] Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the *exact* word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word.[1]
2. To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms which merely echo old moods. We do not insist on 'free verse' as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea.
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring or old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.
4. To present an image (hence the name: 'Imagist'). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.
6. Finally most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.[2]

Succeeding anthologies help to annotate the vocabulary employed. We are told for instance that 'the "exact word" does not mean the word which exactly describes the object in itself, it means the "exact" word which brings the effect of that object before the reader as it presented itself to the poet's mind at the time of writing the poem'.[3] Our interest then, is not in the object itself, but in the poet's reaction to the object. So far, so good; but unfortunately nothing is said about the all-important nature of this reaction. Our only clues are in the words 'effect' and 'presented' and these, if they suggest anything, suggest that the reaction is passive, a mere registering and assembling of sense impressions.[4] The

[1] Presumably an allusion to a remark of Hulme's: 'Plain speech is essentially inaccurate. It is only by new metaphors . . . that it can be made more precise.'

[2] *Some Imagist Poets* (London, 1915), pp. vi-vii.

[3] *Some Imagist Poets* 1916 (London, 1916), p. vi.

[4] Pound, who on occasion is wiser than his brethren, defines the image as presenting 'an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'. He adds that 'it is the

annotation therefore does little to remedy the most serious weakness of the manifesto, its tacit assumption that the best of poetry is imitative rather than creative. The operative words are 'hard', 'clear', 'exact' and 'render', words which are appropriate to the description of something seen, not to the communication of something that is experienced. This insistence on poetry as accurate imitation can be seen even more clearly in the epigrams of Hulme:

> It is essential to prove that beauty may be in *small, dry* things.
> A period of *hard, dry* classical verse is coming.
> The great aim is *accurate, precise and definite description* . . . the poet is forced to use new analogies *and especially to construct a plaster model of a thing* to express his emotion at the sight of the vision he sees, his wonder and ecstasy.[1]

The emphasis is always on outline, size and texture. There is never any recognition of the kind of experience through language, the experience defined and made permanent by language of which all enduring poetry consists. And it follows from this conception of poetry as the presentation of something seen that you are forced to label as rhetoric any comment on the thing seen. Description and evaluation become separable acts and the business of poetry is to describe and not to evaluate. Its aim is 'precise and definite description', never the transformation of description by its agent, the rebirth of the known through the experience of knowing. If the language of poetry differs from that of prose it differs only because it is more accurate, because it matches more exactly the contours of the real. 'Plain speech' says Hulme 'is essentially inaccurate. It is only by new metaphors . . . that it can be made more precise.' Such a conception of poetry is catastrophically misleading and not the less so for being put forward by Bergson.[2] It may be wholly admirable in analysis to separate reality from our judgements on reality. But because poetry rests on the experience of synthesis, every fact in its universe must demand the valuation of the whole poem for its context. The situ-

---

presentation of such a "complex" simultaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation: that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art'. (*Pavannes and Divisions*, New York, 1918.) A poetic image however does not merely 'present' but compels through language a response to the thing presented.

[1] Quotations from T. E. Hulme throughout this essay are from *Speculations*, ed. H. Read (London, 1925) and from Michael Roberts's *T. E. Hulme* (London, 1938), pp. 258–303.

[2] T. E. Hulme, 'Bergson's Theory of Art', *Speculations*, pp. 143–69.

ation must embody its own comment. The image itself, every nuance and colour of its landscape, must be pervaded by the conclusions it is helping to establish. Imagism seldom supplies us with this unity. It is never much more than a form of poetic draughtsmanship. Its style is accordingly an exterior device, a means of recording something felt or perceived, not the living power and operative agent through which that perception or emotion comes into being. The criticism can perhaps be better defined by considering the last stanza of Aldington's *Choricos*:

> For silently
> Brushing the fields with red-shod feet,
> With purple robe
> Searing the grass as with a sudden flame,
> Death,
> Thou hast come upon us.
> And of all the ancient songs
> Passing to the swallow-blue halls
> By the dark streams of Persephone,
> This only remains—
> That in the end we turn to thee,
> Death,
> We turn to thee, singing
> One last song.

The passage has grace and a certain languid unity but it is a unity of gesture not of being. At the end of it we have really learned nothing about death except that it is fashionable to sing when we confront it. Contrast any Elizabethan comment in the same mood (the great scene from *Antony and Cleopatra*, for instance, or that between Isabella and Claudia in the third act of *Measure for Measure*) and it will be plain that the coherence achieved there is of an entirely different and superior order. Even in lines so apparently artless as 'Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have / Immortal longings in me' a universe of values is suggested. The crown is the imperial crown of Egypt; but it is also death, the consummation of life. The double function of 'immortal' ('immortal longings' and 'longings for immortality') is accordingly essential as a comment. One has to be arrested by the ambiguity in order to realize that it does not exist, since the 'crown', the reward of an immortal longing, can never be less than immortality. It is of course platitudinous to assert that Aldington's poems do

not achieve this richness and I shall have lived unnecessarily on the public goodwill if I go on to suggest that Aldington is not Shakespeare. These differences are worth insisting on only because they exemplify an inherent deficiency in the best of Imagist writing. If the 'great aim' of poetry is restricted to description then it follows that the language of the poet must remain neutral to the objects it is describing. It can light up its subject with certain preconceptions, or bring to it the colouring of a given emotional mood. But the mood remains unqualified and static. It is asserted rather than created; the poem can stabilize but it cannot change it. Such limitations are the natural consequence of regarding the thing represented as something external to the act of representation. They are therefore to be expected not only in Imagist theory but also, to a greater or less extent, in all those 'representational' theories of poetry which descend from Aristotle and from classical criticism to Bergson. But in Greek tragedy or even Miltonic epic—forms in which the thing said is freely separable from the way of saying it—the limitation is not unfair to its material and the theory provides the appropriate apparatus for the poetic facts which it was designed to interpret. The difficulty arises with reflective and lyric poetry, where the language is the form, not the vehicle of its content, and where the thing said is inseparable from the way of saying it. To discuss such material adequately we need a theory of poetic activity in which, to quote Coleridge, 'the act of contemplation makes the thing contemplated'. The mind, in such experience, is united to its object in order to create the reality which it knows. This unity, in my opinion, is characteristic of the best lyric and reflective poetry; a theory like Imagism which can make no provision for it is bound to approach such writing in the wrong way. Its consequence can only be that the poet, compelled to represent rather than to experience, is forced to expel from his imagination all generalizations, all moral imperatives, and all evaluations or syntheses of fact which must be lived through to acquire their poetic validity. But a universe so simplified is necessarily devoid of any significant structure or of any sense of movement to an inclusive unity. The order it provides is formalized and lifeless and the images it initiates never extend into or demand the context and completion of the poem. These deficiencies are evident in several of H. D.'s lyrics:

I saw the first pear
as it fell—
the honey seeking, golden-banded,
the yellow swarm
was not more fleet than I,
(Spare us from loveliness)
and I fell prostrate
crying:
you have flayed us
with your blossoms.
spare us the beauty
of fruit trees.

The honey-seeking
paused not,
The air thundered their song
and I alone was prostrate
O rough-hewn
god of the orchard
I bring you an offering—
do you, alone unbeautiful,
son of the god
spare us from loveliness

these fallen hazel-nuts,
stripped late of their green sheaths,
grapes, red-purple,
their berries
dripping with wine,
pomegranates already broken,
and shrunken figs
and quinces untouched,
I bring you as offering.

It will be noted that if the particular images in this poem possess any force, it is only because of the repeated (and 'cosmic') supplication. But the poem merely circles round this supplication; the decorative catalogue of fruits with which it ends is evidence that no progression has been achieved or attempted. There is not, as in the well-known lines which follow, a completion of the abstract by the concrete, a demand by each for the presence of the other:

> Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
> Like harmony in music; there is a dark
> Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
> Discordant elements, makes them cling together
> In one society.

The effect here depends on two contrasted sets of associations. 'Harmony' and 'Workmanship' suggest a pre-ordained pattern based on eternal law; 'reconciles' and 'cling' with their suppressed image of separated lovers suggest the tension and conflicts of actual existence and the sense of order it progressively achieves. But the immortal spirit 'grows like harmony', reconciling discords; the 'dark, inscrutable' workmanship cannot be separated from its concrete and human realization. The passage therefore does not merely declare certain abstract and cosmic principles of order; it also defines through its distinctive imagery the way in which that order is established in human reality. The concrete lives 'in one society' with the general in Wordsworth's metaphors as well as in his philosophy; speculative truths are made vital by their functioning in an accurate, precise and definite experience. If the Imagists had followed Pound's condescending advice ('read as much of Wordsworth as does not seem too unutterably dull"[1]) they might perhaps have understood from such passages that no isolation of the local from the cosmic can be effected, and that an image is poetically justifiable only when its own implicit valuation completes a whole system of metaphor and comment. The requirement is well illustrated by this 'abstraction' from *Troilus and Cressida*:

> Time hath, my lord a wallet at his back
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion.

Even the casual 'my lord' is indispensable. It is 'in character' for Ulysses, but in character also for the life of the image. It is part of the picture which the image proposes (the generous lord helping the impoverished beggar) but it also succeeds in commenting on that picture since, by suggesting that time lives on our charity, it makes us more conscious that we can afford to yield nothing to time. Ulysses' ironical courtesy moreover stimulates the recognition that the negligent 'lord' is really time's servant. After this one cannot help seeing that time's 'wallet' is really bottomless and

[1] 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagist', *Poetry* (Chicago), Jan. 1913.

that all that remains of the grandeur of Achilles is his helpless and destructive reliance on his past. The manner in which the second line fades away (the last foot of the pentameter can barely be sounded) perfectly captures this self-defeating negligence. The personification is thus intensely dramatic, and dramatic not only because it occurs in a drama. Like every poetic image it possesses its own life; but that life is made more particular and vivid by its incorporation in the context of the whole. Similarly when Ulysses talks of 'this chaos where degree is suffocate', 'degree' and 'chaos' are presumably two of the cosmic abstractions which the well-dressed Imagist is advised to abhor. But like the mendicant 'time', they acquire their local reality. The image of 'suffocation', of 'chaos' stifling 'degree' suggests far more forcibly than any direct assertion the inherent will of the universe to order. That suggestion is weighted by the theme of Ulysses' homily, the progressive collapse of each stage of being into the stage below it till everything returns to that murderous impotence from which the creation of order first began.

Without needing to press illustration further, it should be plain that no vigorous tradition of poetic writing can afford to separate description from comment or the abstract from the concrete. When the eighteenth century did so its powers of observation became atrophied and abstract, and when the nineteenth did so, its powers of generalization became standardized and lifeless. The concern of any new movement in poetry should be to reconcile these separated elements, and to bring them together in the wholeness of poetic experience. All that Imagism seems to propose, however, is a new version of an ancient mistake. The dissociation of sensibility it inherits is strengthened and not corrected by its doctrines, its implicit separation of the object described from the language of describing. Its fear of 'sonorous' generalities thus leads, not to a fusion of the general with the particular, but to a microcosmic obsession with the minute and concrete. The elements of the poetic synthesis are driven further apart instead of being unified. The world of description becomes flat, characterless, and devoid of moral shading but those who like Aldington find its climate unhealthy can only desert it for the kind of cosmic statement which Imagism has ostensibly been designed to repudiate.

> And even if the release takes place
> And the dialogue of the two natures is perfect
> Still, the end must be tragic. It is easy to see that,
> Though the fundamental essential tragedy perhaps
> (Some say 'of course')
> Is not death but birth.

And here is another sample of 'accurate, precise and definite description' taken from Aldington's poem on his childhood:

> The town was dull;
> The front was dull;
> The High Street and the other street were dull—
> And there was a public park, I remember,
> And that was damned dull too.

The two worlds exclude, instead of completing each other. Generalities in these poems are uncompromisingly general just as the images in other Imagist poems are husks of sensation emptied of all comment. And when as in Fletcher's *The Attainment*, the two elements are mingled, the relationships between them remain static and external:

> Daring in my humility
> I tore the veil aside and there lay truth
> Outstretched and shining like a sleeping bride
> Beyond the grasp of genius or of youth.
> Long I gazed lovingly on her; she slept still;
> And in her naked glory all the earth
> Dwindled down to a narrow speck, until
> I rose and, ere I passed the gates of birth,
> I prayed that as Isaiah's lips with fire
> Were purged, so on my lips the fire might be.
> And then I merged with that eternity
> Which is beyond the world and its desire.

Professor Hughes informs us that this reversion to nineteenth century rhetoric was dictated by Fletcher's 'inner needs'.[1] But it is surprising how often the needs of Imagist poets either prevent them from writing poetry at all or else make them write poems which are the very reverse of Imagist. Thus Pound left the movement soon after it began and Flint after 1920 devoted himself increasingly to translation and reviewing. Fletcher's return to

[1] Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

'cosmicism' has already been discussed. Lawrence's appearance in the Imagist anthologies was not much more than an entertaining accident. Aldington whose early poems rank as Imagist classics drifted more and more towards philosophical rhetoric. Only H.D. has remained faithful to the Imagist manifesto and H.D.'s development, as Professor Hughes admits, 'has been chiefly from the short lyric to the long, or rather, from the lyric to the narrative and dramatic poem. Certainly she has not perceptibly widened her art and it is questionable how much she has deepened it; what she has done is to lengthen it'.[1] The sterility of Imagism could not be better brought out than in a comment of this kind on the perfect Imagist, and it is a barrenness which unfortunately extends to something more than a local failure of doctrine or procedure. The conception of poetry as a form of description, rather than as a mode of experience, is one which corrupts not only Imagism but many of the alternatives which criticism sets against it. It limits our use of the resources of language since not all the evocations of language are descriptive. It compels us to distinguish the technique of a poem from the perceptions which that technique has been devised to express. It separates imagery from its kernel of comment and generalities from their concrete validation. Because of these simplifications it is also unhistorical; it can see the past only as an external prescription, not as a power of meaning in the present. Finally these partitions and exclusions, even if they do not make poetic experience impossible, must interfere seriously with its range and effectiveness. They are therefore bitterly hostile to that personally experienced yet representative synthesis from which the poetry of each generation requires to be created.

Having discussed the failings of Imagism one is in a better position to assess its historical significance. Critics have usually seen in the movement the first premonitions of a new order in poetry, an order whose interests are dramatically opposed to the traditional standards of nineteenth century writing. One's doubts about such credentials are natural; they are strengthened by Livingstone Lowes's discovery that admirable Imagist poems can be made by putting Meredith's novels into free verse.[2] Since

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[2] 'An Unacknowledged Imagist', *Nation*, February 24, 1916; *Convention and Revolt in Poetry* (London, 1930), pp. 178–84.

similar results can be secured by rearranging Pater (see, for example, the passage from *The Renaissance* which Yeats puts at the beginning of the Oxford Book) one is forced to conclude that the Imagists are really less modern than they are made to be. The manifestoes apparently deny this—'we believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life'[1]—but despite this brave show of up-to-dateness the preferences of Imagism seem rooted in the past and its reaction to the present essentially defensive: 'It is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past'. Far from being a credo of modernity this is almost an apology for not being modern enough. One would expect the people who devised this formula to be far more interested in Sapphics than in aeroplanes. So it is not surprising that when Aldington thinks of Dover, he uses it exclusively as material for disgust, and that when Flint writes of London, his poem is not about city life at all but about green skies, moonlight, and the climbing of a birch tree. This repudiation of the present (or what is only a stage better, the cultivation of simplified and static emotions about it) culminates in these remarks of H.D.'s:

> . . . the inner world of imagination, the ivory tower, where poets presumably do live, in memory, does stand stark with the sun-lit isles around it, while battle and din of battle and the whole dreary, tragic spectacle of our time seems blurred and sodden and not to be recalled, save in moments of repudiation, historical necessity. . . . Miss Monroe was one of the first to print and recognize my talent. But how strangely, farcically blind to our predicament.[2] The letter suggested with really staggeringly inept solicitude that H. D. would do so well—maybe, finally, if she could get into 'life', into the rhythm of our time, in touch with events, and so on and so on and so on. I don't know what else she said. I was laughing too much.

It may be true, as her critics have frequently argued, that H.D.'s talents were born out of their time. That in itself is no condemnation of them. Anachronisms have their place in poetry and the

[1] The claim is more fervent a year later: 'Imagism asks to be judged by different standards from those employed in nineteenth-century art. . . . This must not be construed into the desire to belittle our forerunners. On the contrary, the Imagists have the greatest admiration for the past and humility towards it. But they have been caught in the throes of a new birth. The exterior world is changing, and with it men's feelings, and every age must express its feelings in its own individual way.' *Some Imagist Poets* 1916 (London, 1916), Preface, pp. vii–viii.

[2] 'A Note on Poetry', *The Oxford Anthology of American Literature* (New York, 1938), p. 1287.

language and values of a different civilization may well speak significantly of the age in which we live. But to do so they must be regulated by an emotion more complex and civilized than one of dainty disgust. Since the doctrines of Imagism, and the temperaments of many of its poets are hostile to the development of this complex reaction the movement fails to be vitally representative either of the traditional or the new. It is therefore unable, as the best of poetry is able, to discover and regenerate tradition as an element in the meaning of the new. The technical changes it initiates merely preserve the sensibility of the nineties by providing it with an up-to-date exterior. One must turn to other and more critical talents for the deeper changes of sentiment and insight which should inform and justify these outer innovations.

THE WORLD OF WALLACE STEVENS

LOUIS L. MARTZ

> Canaries in the morning, orchestras
> In the afternoon, balloons at night. That is
> A difference, at least, from nightingales,
> Jehovah and the great sea-worm. The air
> Is not so elemental nor the earth
> So near.
> But the sustenance of the wilderness
> Does not sustain us in the metropoles.[1]

THUS Wallace Stevens represents the state of man from which his poems spring. The world of Greek myth and traditional beauty, the world of the Hebrew Diety, the world of Nordic legend—worlds of imaginative faith and of unity between man and the universe—these things are gone. Man, disinherited, has become the alien of the universe. No miraculous manna falls. Wallace Stevens lives in a world from which the elemental, the

[1] 'Academic Discourse at Havana' (1936).

Dates following the titles of poems indicate publication in these volumes by Stevens: *Harmonium*, 1923; *Ideas of Order*, 1936; *The Man with the Blue Guitar & Other Poems*, 1937; *Parts of a World*, 1942; *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction*, 1942 (limited edn.); *Esthétique du Mal*, 1945 (limited edn.); *Transport to Summer*, 1947 (includes the two preceding volumes).

supernatural, and the mythical have been drained, and in which the deeper instincts of the human race are consequently starving. Somehow, by his own mind and senses, man must find sustenance, must make terms with air and earth, must establish some relation between himself and the world about him. The 'war between the mind/And sky, between thought and day and night', must be resolved: this is the poet's mission.

His Hymn to the Virgin, 'To the One of Fictive Music', is thus in part nostalgic song, but more than this; Stevens suggests here a mode of redemption: the Virgin becomes a symbol of the stabilizing and nourishing power of human imagination, when, through its most intense images, it gives transcendence and glory to familiar things:

> Sister and mother and diviner love,
> And of the sisterhood of the living dead
> Most near, most clear, and of the clearest bloom,
> And of the fragrant mothers the most dear
> And queen, and of diviner love the day
> And flame and summer and sweet fire. . . .
>
> . . . of all vigils musing the obscure,
> That apprehends the most which sees and names,
> As in your name, an image that is sure,
> Among the arrant spices of the sun,
> O bough and bush and scented vine, in whom
> We give ourselves our likest issuance.
>
> Yet not too like, yet not so like to be
> Too near, too clear, saving a little to endow
> Our feigning with the strange unlike, whence springs
> The difference that heavenly pity brings.
> For this, musician, in your girdle fixed
> Bear other perfumes. On your pale head wear
> A band entwining, set with fatal stones.
> Unreal, give back to us what once you gave:
> The imagination that we spurned and crave.

This is one of Stevens' earlier poems, published in *Harmonium*, but one finds here his aesthetic and philosophy (or rather, his aesthetic-philosophy) fully developed, as perhaps one might expect in a poet who published his first volume at the age of forty-four. His later poems re-explore and restate, but do not centrally

modify this view of the imagination's role in life. In the recent *Esthétique du Mal* one finds the same theme, now expressed in the muted, more austere tone of an older man who has mastered a meditative, abstract form of poetry:

> The death of Satan was a tragedy
> For the imagination. A capital
> Negation destroyed him in his tenement
> And, with him, many blue phenomena.

Blue, as in Stevens' sequence, 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', is a symbol of the imagination; without that dominant, sustaining blue:

> How cold the vacancy
> When the phantoms are gone and the shaken realist
> First sees reality. The mortal no
> Has its emptiness and tragic expirations.
> The tragedy, however, may have begun.
> Again, in the imagination's new beginning,
> In the yes of the realist spoken because he must
> Say yes, spoken because under every no
> Lay a passion for yes that had never been broken.

The history of Man, like the histories of individual men, is a series of tragic dramas decreed by the fact of mortality, by 'the unalterable necessity/Of being this unalterable animal'. But what is this 'yes of the realist' that may, perhaps, mark the beginning of another drama? It must be some affirmation that can achieve what Stevens in *Harmonium* has called,

> The liaison, the blissful liaison,
> Between himself and his environment,
> Which was, and is, chief motive, first delight,
> For him, and not for him alone.[1]

Whether expressed in the splendour and gaudiness of *Harmonium*, or in the more restrained, more abstract verse of his latest volume, the answer is the same. It lies in the cultivation of sensibility and in the affirmation of that sensibility through works of the human imagination.

Take the poem 'Nomad Exquisite', from *Harmonium*:

> As the immense dew of Florida
> Brings forth
> The big-finned palm
> And green vine angering for life,

[1] 'The Comedian as the Letter C'.

As the immense dew of Florida
Brings forth hymn and hymn
From the beholder,
Beholding all these green sides
And gold sides of green sides,

And blessed mornings,
Meet for the eye of the young alligator,
And lightning colors
So, in me, come flinging
Forms, flames, and the flakes of flames.

The speaker has established a liaison with nature: the dew of Florida makes him too a green thing 'angering for life', the world is a unity; man lives and grows, as the poem itself achieves unity and growth by its subtle repetitions and balances, and by its binding, emphatic sound-effects, coming to a bold climax in the final line. Take, now, Stevens' view of a sunrise in his last volume, in a poem simply entitled 'The Red Fern':

The large-leaved day grows rapidly,
And opens in this familiar spot
Its unfamiliar, difficult fern,
Pushing and pushing red after red.

There are doubles of this fern in clouds,
Less firm than the paternal flame,
Yet drenched with its identity,
Reflections and off-shoots, mimic-motes

And mist-mites, dangling seconds, grown
Beyond relation to the parent trunk:
The dazzling, bulging, brightest core,
The furiously burning father-fire. . . .

Infant, it is enough in life
To speak of what you see. But wait
Until sight wakens the sleepy eye
And pierces the physical fix of things.

Here again, in more restrained style, though with the same high subtleties of sound, we have a picture of a world in order: sun, land, and cloud in a unity realized through the eye of man. But not beheld by the simple physical eye—the eye of the imagination

has formed this vision in a single dominant image, which rises through a delicate harmony of sound-effects to the climactic third stanza, and closes with a meditative simplicity typical of the later Stevens.

Amid this 'moving chaos that never ends', order is thus found by the poet in moments of supreme awareness, when one object, one scene, one person, one idea, is firmly grasped by integrated mind and sense. Round that one thing the world composes itself, relation is established, as in 'Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers' (1942:)

> the inhuman colors fell
> Into place beside her, where she was,
> Like human conciliations, more like
> A profounder reconciling, an act,
> An affirmation free from doubt.
> The crude and jealous formlessness
> Became the form and the fragrance of things
> Without clairvoyance, close to her.

The affirmation is the momentary experience of unity and stability. This sense of the 'completed scene' will not last, but for a time things are,

> Placed, so, beyond the compass of change,
> Perceived in a final atmosphere;
>
> For a moment final. . . .[1]

These experiences may be simple perceptions of the 'rankest trivia', which Stevens calls 'tests of the strength /Of his aesthetic, his philosophy'; they may be the realization of large, complex landscapes; they may be explorations into the realm of the pure idea. Let us be clear about this last point, for Stevens is often called a hater of ideas and of reason. Though some of his less guarded exclamations may seem to bear this out, *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* should dispel any misconception. His apparent hatred of reason is at bottom only a hatred of what he calls 'reason's click-clack, its *applied* /Enflashings.' The 'practical', systematic application of rational power destroys imagination, limits sensibility, crushes men into 'the common life', 'A black line beside a white line', a place where 'The men have no shadows /And the women have only one side.'

[1] 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', VI.

> Rationalists, wearing square hats,
> Think, in square rooms,
> Looking at the floor,
> Looking at the ceiling.

missing the significant landscapes. But his 'major man', poet, prophet, philosopher, or all three in one, comes

> from reason,
> Lighted at midnight by the studious eye,
> Swaddled in revery.

This speculative reason, 'This warmth in the blood-world for the pure idea', stirs his admiration, for reason striving to conceive the Platonic Idea is a fictive power.

Such a union of poetry and philosophy is declared in the late poem, 'Asides on the Oboe', but had already been implied in the early 'Homunculus et la Belle Étoile', where he says of the starlight:

> It is a good light, then, for those
> That know the ultimate Plato,
> Tranquillizing with this jewel
> The torments of confusion.

Notes toward a Supreme Fiction sums it all up:

> The poem refreshes life so that we share,
> For a moment, the first idea . . . It satisfies
> Belief in an immaculate beginning
>
> And sends us, winged by an unconscious will,
> To an immaculate end. We move between these points:
> From that ever-early candor to its late plural
>
> And the candor of them is the strong exhilaration
> Of what we feel from what we think, of thought
> Beating in the heart, as if blood newly came,
>
> An elixir, an excitation, a pure power.
> The poem, through candor, brings back a power again
> That gives a candid kind to everything.[1]

Candor, in its root meaning, here signifies the thing grasped in its radiant essence, the full, clear, white, pure, dazzling realization of the world and all things in it. The 'ever-early candor' is the original

[1] Part I, Poem 3.

Idea of the thing, or the thing as it should be. 'Its late plural' is the varied manifestation of that essence as now exhibited in the world about us—often a sorry assortment of objects encrusted with the dirt of time, but, seen in their first idea, radiant. Then 'Life's nonsense pierces us with strange relation', and the Imagination has, for the moment, achieved its constant function, for 'The first idea is an imagined thing.'

Such perceptions are hardly to be planned, but they come to the man who trains his imagination to perceive them. Perhaps, says Stevens,

> The truth depends on a walk around a lake,
>
> A composing as the body tires, a stop
> To see hepatica, a stop to watch
> A definition growing certain and
>
> A wait within that certainty, a rest
> In the swags of pine-trees bordering the lake.[1]

Note here the interaction of precise generality and precise concreteness, each supporting and enriching the other, as if the abstract definition were a flower or a grove. And indeed it is: the flower, the grove, perceived in candour, define momentarily the observer's place in the world. It is a delicate and complicated skill, this realization of candour:

> . . . the difficultest rigor is forthwith,
> On the image of what we see, to catch from that
>
> Irrational moment its unreasoning.

Then,

> We reason of these things with later reason
> And we make of what we see, what we see clearly
> And have seen, a place dependent on ourselves.[2]

But modern man is too often subordinate to the place, defeated by his environment. *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* dramatizes this failure by contrast with the animal kingdom:

> The lion roars at the enraging desert,
> Reddens the sand with his red-colored noise,
> Defies red emptiness to evolve his match,

[1] *Ibid.*, Part I, Poem 7. [2] *Ibid.*, Part III, Poems 1, 4.

Master by foot and jaws and by the mane,
Most supple challenger.[1]

Red, symbol of anger and violent blood, dominates and fills the emptiness of inanimate nature. And similarly,

the elephant
Breaches the darkness of Ceylon with blares,

The glitter-goes on surfaces of tanks,
Shattering velvetest far-away. The bear,
The ponderous cinnamon, snarls in his mountain

At summer thunder and sleeps through winter snow.
But you, ephebe, look from your attic window,
Your mansard with a rented piano. You lie

In silence upon your bed. You clutch the corner
Of the pillow in your hand. You writhe and press
A bitter utterance from your writhing, dumb,

Yet voluble of dumb violence. You look
Across the roofs as sigil and as ward
And in your centre mark them and are cowed . . .

These are the heroic children whom time breeds
Against the first idea—to lash the lion,
Caparison elephants, teach bears to juggle.

The piano, along with other musical instruments, is used by Stevens as a symbol of the imagination: in this context 'rented piano' is both literally right and symbolically an exact expression of decayed imagination. The roofs form a *sigil*—a seal, an enchanting talisman; or a *ward*—a guard, a prison; both words also suggest a legal bond. In such bondage the prime function, the very Idea of man, has been lost: man is not alive unless he can achieve the creative power and 'human arrangement' implied by the circus imagery of the final lines.

Only the imagination can achieve this desired freedom and domination, as the singing woman beside the sea creates 'The Idea of Order at Key West' (1936). 'The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea' is used by Stevens, early and late, to represent 'The World without Imagination', the 'universal machine':

[1] *Ibid.*, Part I, Poem 5.

> The water never formed to mind or voice,
> Like a body wholly body, fluttering
> Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
> Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
> That was not ours although we understood,
> Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

But as the woman at Key West sings, the sea becomes a part of her song: she creates, she composes the scene:

> It may be that in all her phrases stirred
> The grinding water and the gasping wind;
> But it was she and not the sea we heard.
>
> For she was the maker of the song she sang. . . .
>
> It was her voice that made
> The sky acutest at its vanishing.
> She measured to the hour its solitude.
> She was the single artificer of the world
> In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
> Whatever self it had, became the self
> That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
> As we beheld her striding there alone,
> Knew that there never was a world for her
> Except the one she sang, and, singing, made.

And as the listeners leave the spot, it seems that 'The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there',

> Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
> Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
> Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

The unique vision of Stevens may be illustrated by comparing this poem with one by Wordsworth that may have suggested it: 'The Solitary Reaper'. In Wordsworth's poem the imagery draws the reader away from the scene and the figure of the singer during the two central stanzas: the poet's main effort is bent toward moving outward by connotation from the particular Highland girl and spot into the breadth of the world and the depth of history. The girl's song suggests immense distances of space and time. This is, no doubt, the peculiar greatness of nineteenth-century Romantic poetry at its best. But in Stevens' poem the whole effort is bent toward realizing the particular spot and girl: the scene focuses in-

ward upon the singer. So, throughout Stevens' poetry, the radiant particular is fixed in its place, for in his world it is only thus that man may dominate 'The meaningless plungings of water and the wind.' 'Blessed rage for order,' says Stevens, rage, that is, for more than the mechanical order of the sea, whose

> merely revolving wheel
> Returns and returns, along the dry, salt shore.
> There is a mother whose children need more than that.

The human need—to realize and thus compose and dominate the world by imagination:

> Poet, patting more nonsense foamed
> From the sea, conceive for the courts
> Of these academies, the diviner health
> Disclosed in common forms. Set up
> The rugged black, the image. Design
> The touch. Fix quiet.[1]

The poet, modeller of sand, pats the meaningless variety tossed up by the sea of physical life and another Venus emerges from the foam.

II

So, in the world of Wallace Stevens, the poet, 'meaning by the poet any man of imagination', attempts to work out his own salvation. The task is strenuous, for here is a fluent, glittering world, a world of eternal change, a world in which one veers from exaltation to dejection and back again, seeking the bright moments that justify man's sombre fate, seeking always,

> the visible rock, the audible,
> The brilliant mercy of a sure repose,
> On this present ground, the vividest repose,
> Things certain sustaining us in certainty.[2]

Man tires of the strenuous search, feels at times the desire to relax in a merely passive connection with the world about him, wishes at times 'To have the ant of the self changed to an ox/With its organic boomings.' He tires, too, of the 'exhilarations of changes' in an active sensibility, wishes at times to see the world 'Without shadows, without magnificence,/The flesh, the bone, the dirt, the

[1] 'Prelude to Objects' (1942). [2] 'Credences of Summer' (1947).

stone.' Such variations are the inevitable minor of Stevens' major. Yet the dominant tone is sure and clear: the 'central' of the mind is action, creation; thus, in 'Hibiscus on the Sleeping Shores' (1923), the mind is imaged as a moth:

> that monstered moth
> Which had lain folded against the blue
> And the colored purple of the lazy sea,
>
> And which had drowsed along the bony shores,
> Shut to the blather that the water made,
> Rose up besprent and sought the flaming red
>
> Dabbled with yellow pollen.

This flaming red hibiscus is an absolute, a fixity, like the ripe pear with which 'autumn beguiles the fatalist', or the chrysanthemums whose fragrance disguises 'the clanking mechanism/Of machine within machine within machine', or like the lilacs from which 'we breathe/An odor evoking nothing, absolute'.

Such moments represent 'The poem of the mind in the act of finding/What will suffice'. Sometimes the mind, that roaming moth, is satisfied by a simple stillness and single clarity which reprieves it from its struggle to attain 'the complicate, the amassing harmony':

> The blue woman looked and from her window named
>
> The corals of the dogwood, cold and clear,
> Cold, coldly delineating, being real,
> Clear and, except for the eye, without intrusion.[2]

Such a satisfaction may seem far removed from the complex vision of Key West, yet one inevitably involves the other. The imagination grips the object tightly; then, as Stevens has said in a recent essay,[1] 'the proliferation of resemblances extends an object'. 'What our eyes behold may well be the text of life but one's meditations on the text and the disclosures of these meditations are no less a part of the structure of reality.' Through metaphor, even through such a simple metaphor as 'corals of the dogwood', the imagination achieves a pleasurable metamorphosis of the ob-

[1] *Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction*, Part III, Poem 2.
[2] 'Three Academic Pieces', *Partisan Review*. May–June 1947.

ject which 'enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it'.

> Three times the concentred self takes hold, three times
> The thrice concentred self, having possessed
>
> The object, grips it in savage scrutiny,
> Once to make captive, once to subjugate
> Or yield to subjugation, once to proclaim
> The meaning of the capture, this hard prize,
> Fully made, fully apparent, fully found.[1]

Whether we are dealing with a simple object seen in its 'first idea,' or with some more complex transfiguration of that object, we are always looking with the mind's eye:

> The magnificent cause of being,
> The imagination, the one reality
> In this imagined world.

That is why objects do not exist apart from us: we are the makers of reality, and the 'unreal' fabrications of the mind, simple or complex, are in the end our only absolutes:

> These trees and their argentines, their dark-spiced branches,
> Grow out of the spirit or they are fantastic dust.
>
> The bud of the apple is desire, the down-falling gold,
> The catbird's gobble in the morning half-awake——
>
> These are real only if I make them so. Whistle
> For me, grow green for me and, as you whistle and grow green,
>
> Intangible arrows quiver and stick in the skin
> And I taste at the root of the tongue the unreal of what is real.[2]

For Stevens nothing will suffice but this satisfaction of continually renewing, by imaginative metamorphosis, his relation to the world of physical objects. For him, 'The greatest poverty is not to live/In a physical world':

> To lose sensibility, to see what one sees,
> As if sight had not its own miraculous thrift,
> To hear only what one hears, one meaning alone,
> As if the paradise of meaning ceased
> To be paradise, it is this to be destitute.
> This is the sky divested of its fountains.[3]

[1] 'Credences of Summer' (1947).
[2] 'Holiday in Reality' (1947).
[3] *Esthétique du Mal*, IX.

This intense belief in the ultimate significance of acute and multifold perception gives the poetry of Wallace Stevens its unique quality. 'A passionately niggling nightingale', he aims 'to make a new intelligence prevail' through sure, yet flexible management of precarious cadences, through deft placing of sound-effects, and through a knack for putting the unusual word in exactly the spot where it will carry the greatest meaning—often multiple meaning. Take 'miraculous thrift' in the last passage. 'Thrift' is saving, salvation, through a hoarding up of the few joys available to man; the word may also suggest 'prosperity', 'vigorous growth', and 'means of thriving'. Or consider the lines which follow the above passage from *Esthétique du Mal*:

> Here in the west indifferent crickets chant
> Through our indifferent crises. Yet we require
> Another chant, an incantation, as in
> Another and later genesis, music
> That buffets the shapes of its possible halcyon
> Against the haggardie.

'Indifferent crickets' include the would-be poets, the jabberers of our time; but note the multiple meaning of 'indifferent' here. These voices are apathetic, not really concerned with the problems of the time; in quality they are 'neutral; neither good nor bad, large nor small, desirable nor undesirable'; they have 'no preponderating influence or value'. And the daily 'crises' of our western world are the same. 'Haggardie' seems to be one of Stevens' numerous coinages, but its meaning is vigorously clear. It signifies the sum of things haggard: things wild, untrained, untamed, or wild-looking from 'want of rest, fatigue, anxiety, terror, or worry',—an exact description of the modern world. What we need is to be born again, new Adams, in a 'paradise of meaning'; we need a creative imagination to 'buffet' the 'haggardie' with fictive 'shapes' that will achieve some moments of man-made calm. The similarity in sound and cadence in the words 'halcyon' and 'haggardie' serves to emphasize the contrast between the implications of 'halcyon', the fabled bird that calms the wind and waves, and 'haggard', the wild hawk. Every word in the passage is thus precisely placed to carry precise meaning.

Many of the passages quoted earlier will provide similarly rich examples of the unusual word. The 'green vine *angering* for life'; 'a *capital* negation'; 'the *arrant* spices of the sun'; 'the physical *fix*

of things'; 'that ever-early *candor*'; 'the *swags* of pine trees'; 'the *glitter-goes* on surfaces of *tanks*' (the latter the exact word for the Indian setting); 'the *blather* that the water made.' But let us take one final example for close analysis, the first stanza of the finest poem in *Harmonium*, 'Sunday Morning':

> Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
> Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
> And the green freedom of a cockatoo
> Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
> The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
> She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
> Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
> As a calm darkens among water-lights.
> The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
> Seem things in some procession of the dead,
> Winding across wide water, without sound.
> The day is like wide water, without sound,
> Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
> Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
> Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

'Complacencies'—the satisfactions and contentments of the physical, as with this woman who has risen 'late' on a holiday, and now sits in the sun, wearing her 'peignoir', the 'loose dressing-gown worn while hair is combed or on coming out of bath.' The French word suggests a cultured atmosphere; in every connotation it is exactly right to set this scene. Note how the abstract and foreign wording of 'complacencies of the peignoir' is at once brought to earth by the plain 'coffee and oranges'; this combination of 'the imagination's Latin with /The lingua franca et jocundissima' is one of Stevens' prime traits. 'Green freedom of a cockatoo'; the green bird is out of his cage, enjoying the refreshment of freedom, like the woman herself, on this day escaping the confinements of the weekday world. These satisfactions have for her a snap and crackle, a pungency, that seems to dissipate memories of the Crucifixion, or of the ritual that now, on this morning, celebrates that 'ancient sacrifice'. And yet she cannot quite escape these religious memories. They do not at once deeply affect her—the memories are like the dark surfaces of a calm sea. Yet, gradually, as her religious instinct asserts itself, the physical satisfactions grow pale: they 'seem things in some procession of the dead', as she remembers they are

doomed to extinction. The water imagery, introduced to suggest her undulating calm of mind, now is easily transformed into an image suggesting the emptiness of a merely physical universe—and then is again transformed into the actual seas that separate her western world from Palestine. By subtle transitions, without any break in the flow of association, we have been moved from the 'complacencies' of the physical to a world of religious blood and death. Religious feeling has overwhelmed the sensory, and the earlier 'complacency' seems now only the illusion of security. This is the highest achievement of what we might call the 'hieratic' style of the earlier Stevens, but it is not superior to the late style of *Esthétique du Mal.* The modes of writing are different, each excellent in its kind, showing the gradual mutation in style that marks every writer whose concern for style arises from his concern with the fundamental problems of existence.

Such examples should warn us against accepting the charges of 'imprecision' that are sometimes levelled against Stevens. Like every other poet, he has written badly at times, but his weaknesses must not blind us to his strength, which lies in the writing of 'accurate songs', or in what he has more recently called 'the romance of the precise'. 'Candor', the sole 'miraculous thrift', resides for him in the precise poetic word, in 'Virgilian cadences'. That is why he is not merely the poetic dandy that he has been called. His interest in the precisions of poetic technique arises from what we might call his dedication to the mission of the poet in the modern world. His poems exist, as he has said in reference to 'Owl's Clover', 'for the purpose of seizing and stating what makes life intelligible and desirable in the midst of great change and great confusion'.

> There is order in neither sea nor sun.
> The shapes have lost their glistening.
> There are these sudden mobs of men,
>
> These sudden clouds of faces and arms,
> An immense suppression, freed,
> These voices crying without knowing for what,
>
> Except to be happy, without knowing how,
> Imposing forms they cannot describe,
> Requiring order beyond their speech. . . .
>
> Some harmonious skeptic soon in a skeptical music

> Will unite these figures of men and their shapes
> Will glisten again with motion, the music
> Will be motion and full of shadows.[1]

His sceptical music offers no all-embracing solution: his search for the still point is not so profound nor so broad as Eliot's; his 'paradise of meaning' has none of the religious and ethical implications that Eliot's rose-garden holds. These are Steven's limitations, and they place him a rung below Eliot and Yeats on the ladder of recent poetic achievement. Yet the responses, the satisfactions that he affirms are those of everyman, in just the degree that everyman possesses active sensibility and imagination. With all his limitations, Stevens is still the poet of those 'great interests of man: air and light, the joy of having a body, the voluptuousness of looking'.[2] By refreshing and quickening these interests, Stevens fulfills his conception of the role of poet, as defined in his essay in *The Language of Poetry:*

> What is his function? Certainly it is not to lead people out of the confusion in which they find themselves. Nor is it, I think, to comfort them while they follow their leaders to and fro. I think that his function is to make his imagination theirs and that he fulfills himself only as he sees his imagination become the light in the minds of others. His role, in short, is to help people to live their lives.[3]

SOME NOTES ON CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY

DAVID DAICHES

THESE remarks are intended as a footnote or supplement to John Taylor's essay in *Focus Two*. Mr Taylor covered a good deal of ground but, as he pointed out himself in his final paragraph, there were some important poets whom he was unable to discuss because he had read their work only in fragments. Of the list of these which he gives, there are two who have not received the

[1] 'Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz' (1936).
[2] Epigraph to 'Evening without Angels' (1936).
[3] 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', *The Language of Poetry*, ed. Allen Tate (Princeton, 1942).

attention they deserve even in the United States and to whom therefore I should like to devote most of my attention. They are John Malcolm Brinnin and Robert Fitzgerald.

Brinnin is a young poet—still in his twenties—who differs from the great majority of his American colleagues, past and present, in being more interested in poetry as an impressive handling of language than in poetry as a vehicle for the expression of important statements. He has given himself a training in poetic techniques that few modern American poets would concede to be necessary or even desirable. As a youngster he worked at exercises in the sonnet form, the Spenserian stanza and a great variety of traditional verse forms simply in order to improve his mastery over language. This is not to say that he is in any sense a 'traditionalist' in his techniques. But it does mean that he has developed that sense of form and of craftsmanship which is so conspicuously lacking in so much recent American poetry. These qualities he shares in some degree with Fitzgerald, and the two stand together in opposition to the main trend of American literature today. That main trend, in both poetry and prose, is towards what one might call *ad hoc* writing, producing works the shape of which is determined solely by the undulating passions and interests of the writer and not at all by the demands of the medium employed. The two great characteristics of modern American literature since Whitman are a rhetorical purpose and a lack of interest in form as such. (Which is one reason why many American critics missed the point of Auden's recent poems based on the *Tempest*, for they were extremely formal and quite unrhetorical.) The norm of American poetry is a rhythmic rhetorical utterance which at its best can be impassioned in the way that the best of MacLeish is impassioned, and at its worst becomes the sentimental good-heartedness of Norman Corwin's radio plays or Carl Carmer's *Taps is Not Enough.*

This rhetorical norm is the basis of the work of that surprisingly large number of good but not too exciting poets who have been flourishing in American for the last fifteen years. Genevieve Taggard with her urgent humanism, Paul Engle, with his desire to prove that he belongs to the soil, Richard Eberhart with his clear-sightedness and good sense, Delmore Schwartz with his worry about the meaning of individual life in our time—these and dozens of others build their poetry on a foundation of rhythmic

rhetorical prose, and though each has his own idiom they are, for all their differences from each other, more like each other than any one of them is like Brinnin.

I suppose it is possible to divide poets, very generally, into those who have something to say and therefore search for a poetic way of saying it (Milton in *Paradise Lost*), and those who are excited by the poetical possibilities of language and in exploiting those possibilities find subjects suggesting themselves (Keats, for example). Of course, this is a grossly over-simplified distinction, but it is perhaps helpful in a limited way. It enables us to see that American poets belong by inheritance to the first group, while British poets, in so far as they inherit the modern 'romantic' tradition, belong to the second. The ideological poet in England is thus always forced to create a new tradition or to go back to a pre-eighteenth century one, while in America it is the second kind of poet who goes counter to the tradition. Brinnin therefore is a revolutionary in America while in Britain he would have been, in a sense, a traditionalist.

Brinnin published his first volume of poems in 1942, when he was twenty-five. This book, entitled *The Garden is Political*, is by itself enough to give him a claim to stand with the best half-dozen young poets now writing in America. The first stanza of the first poem represents something quite strange in American poetry:

> The shifty limpet on his rocky shore
> Contrives a conch to make life possible,
> And the unbelievable giraffe achieves
> A dainty salad from the lissom tree;
> Pretending he is flora in the pond,
> A silly fish will emulate a frond
> To trick the appetite that savors him;
> A rabbit in the snow will do the same.

In the first place, we note that this is a formal stanza, and it is the stanza in which the whole poem (six verses in all) is written. Secondly, though much of the specification of meaning is produced by adjectives, it is the choice of verbs that give the real flavour to the poetry—'contrives' a conch, 'achieves' a dainty salad, 'emulate' a frond, and the final deliberately commonplace verb 'do' taking its place in a march of monosyllables on which the stanza is balanced:

> A rabbit in the snow will do the same.

This is the work of a man who has mastered his medium. Not yet perhaps, a mature poet, for the virtuosity of the adjectives is rather too obvious, but one who faces the medium of his art with confidence and knows what he is about. Put Brinnin's stanza beside this from Delmore Schwartz's *Genesis*:

> What causes move their hearts and make their lives
> In the new world of North America?
> I seen them *make a living*, as they say,
> For this economy is blazing like disease
> Through the thick forest of North America
> (Since men are trees walking, as St. Paul says,
> This trope is true): how many troops
> Are drawn like them from Europe's shore and pain
> To the huge blaze, becoming part of it . . .

There is a superficial similarity between the two stanzas, but the difference is fundamental. Schwartz is arguing with himself, with a view to coming to a conclusion which will benefit himself and his readers; Brinnin, on the other hand, is trying to dominate his medium and produce something wholly objective out of it—a poem, in fact. 'Out of our quarrel with others we make rhetoric', said Yeats once, taking the cue from his father, 'but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.' But most American poets quarrel with themselves in order to clarify their position in quarrelling with others, and so to them both of Yeats's alternatives are in a sense rhetoric. But to quarrel with language in order to tame it, in order to wrest it into a significant shape so that it can then be left alone and observed with profit and excitement from the outside—that is what Brinnin is concerned with.

Or take the first stanza of Brinnin's 'The Georgian House':

> The great house flames from out its blinded eyes
> And every cracked and sabotaged beam falls
> Across the darkening bodies; little mice
> Flee fanwise, and a burning parrot calls
> For sweetmeats, sweetmeats, in his gilded room.

There is an artfulness here, a deliberate preoccupation with poetic statement as such. Little mice do not flee fanwise in the general run of American poetry, and the final, shrill, irrelevant cry of the parrot points the stanza instead of commenting on it.

I do not mean to say that Brinnin has no ideas. One cannot

write poetry without ideas. The point about Brinnin is that the ideas are the excuse for the poem, whereas in Schwartz the poem is the excuse for the ideas. I do not mean either that this implies a necessary inferiority in Schwartz's writing: but is it a very different kind of writing. As a matter of fact, Brinnin's poetry is packed with ideas, and it is precisely the relation of the ideas to the method of expression that makes the poetry. The first stanza of his that I quoted has a full intellectual content, and *those* verbs and *those* adjectives present it. Take part of another poem entitled 'The Alps':

> The crafts of simple men, instructed arms,
> Survive in corners like neglected snow;
> When the arch-conquerers go
> From door to door with bludgeoning alarms,
> Accomplishment is secretive; the voice
> Of quartered sorrow can defy
> A narrowing eye,
> Keeping its wisdom for kinsmen of choice.
>
> Where freedom is an art whose laws remake
> The shape of equity, whose masterpiece
> Is triumph and release
> Of power in the heart to build or break,
> The temporary artisans of war
> Keep bootless tenancy; the hands of the free
> Work silently;
> Their wheel is choice their gift superior.
>
> Look down from Switzerland at dead of night;
> The closing bell in the Louvre on the Seine
> Disbands the day again,
> And on the Dutch lowlands, in vapourous light,
> With lavish arms the windmills swing for none;
> The shadows of the Matterhorn come down
> On the last Swiss town,
> And racing over the slopes, the crazy sun.

This kind of poetic expression is, in a sense, criticism of life, if you prefer to use that criterion; but you will see what it is more clearly if you approach it through a consideration of the technique. The poem is a philosophical one where the ideas are resolved in the final stanza by images. Thus the sun is described as 'crazy' in

the last line because it is rushing to its death (like the armies): the poem seems to me to make clear implicitly that that kind of activity is crazy. It is the crazy sun that by its suicidal action (racing over the slopes to die) brings about the 'policies of night' mentioned in the poem's first stanza. The last image is therefore technically adequate as fulfilling the stanza and is also the most adequate fulfilling of the thought. One cannot make such a remark about Schwartz.

One more quotation, this time from a poem of Brinnin's that appeared in *Poetry* [Chicago] in October, 1946:

> Goodnight, when the door swings
> And the great lock's shuttle tooth comes down
> On darkness and hail fellow,
> Goodnight, my smile, insatiate eye, bald frown,
> Goodnight. In colder carnivals we'll follow
> Our one pleasuance among
> A quietude, ere long,
> That will our desperateness so bundle down
> In earthen intimacy,
> My ways and will and yours will move as one
> When guest by host shall lie
> Lengthwise, and right by wrong.

The hour-glass shape of the stanza here exists in three levels—to the eye, to the ear and to the mind. The cunning way in which moral oblivion descending together with the physical in the final sleep is presented in the last three lines is characteristic of Brinnin. Social life—unsocial life—sociability without life are the three stages here presented, as ideas, as images, as a pattern. The middle, transitional image—the waist of the hour-glass—joins the other two. But it is not *mere* form: it is the only proper form for that content.

Some of the remarks I have made about Brinnin's poetry may sound like commonplaces of poetic criticism. But the point is that, commonplace or not, they do not apply to the bulk of modern American poetry, which consists of the application of craftsmanship to ideas, not the use of ideas as materials for poetry.

I would put Fitzgerald in the same class as Brinnin, with that minority among American poets whose aim as poets is not to find effective statement of what is of interest but rather to make interesting by statement whatever is amenable to such treatment. Fitz-

gerald's first volume (as far as I know) was published in 1935, but more interesting is the volume entitled *A Wreath for the Sea* published by Arrow Editions and distributed by New Directions in 1943. Fitzgerald knows his classics, and has exercised his talent by translations from the Latin. His poem 'Latium' is an exercise of a different kind —an attempt to put the idea of the Roman Republic into verse. It begins rather flatly but soon develops a cool, passionless utterance which, we discover almost to our surprise, is poetry. The quiet conclusion is a three-line stanza:

> With strict limitation on mourners,
> Funeral dirges and incense,
> They sanely buried their dead.

This is an exercise, which becomes poetry almost accidentally as in music a 'study' turns out to be a 'piece'. In his more formal poems Fitzgerald employs a more heavily loaded line than this, and displays an architectonic quality so uncharacteristic of American poetry. His kinship with Brinnin can be seen in such a poem as 'Souls Lake':

> The evergreen shadow and the pale magnolia
> Stripping slowly to the air of May
> Stood still in the night of the honey trees.
> At rest above a star pool with my friends,
> Beside that grove most fit for elegies,
> I made my phrase to out-enchant the night.
>
> The epithalamion, the hush were due,
> For I had fasted and gone blind to see
> What night might be beyond our passages;
> Those stars so chevalier in fearful heaven
> Could not but lay their steel aside and come
> With a grave glitter into my low room. . . .

There is no space to quote it all, but I should like to add the final stanza:

> The heart's planet seemed not so lonely then,
> Seeing what kind it found in that reclining.
> And ah, though sweet the catch of your chorales,
> I heard no singing there among my friends;
> But still were the great waves, the lions shining,
> And infinite still the discourse of the night.

This kind of verse sounds very 'traditional' to English ears, but in fact it is not traditional; it is poetry derived from the poet's own resources and wholly neglects the American norm. I might be rash and say that there is something of Whitman in nearly all modern American poets, but not in Fitzgerald or Brinnin. (I might add, not in Penn Warren or Peale Bishop or Wallace Stevens, for very different reasons—the first two are in the 'metaphysical' tradition, while the art of Stevens is formal almost to the point of ritual and is similar in some aspects to the early Edith Sitwell. The Latin inspiration, both in form and content, of much of Fitzgerald's poetry does not represent, as perhaps it would in Britain, a 'reactionary' element in his writing; it simply shows that this poet has gone to a personal source of inspiration not shared by others of his time and place. The norm in Fitzgerald is elegiac, not rhetorical. The elegy is not an American mode. It is an English mode, however, and in England we are too close to Tennyson to risk being Virgilian.

'The Shore of Life' illustrates Fitzgerald's elegiac tone as well as any poem. I quote the second half of the poem:

> Upstream the matted tugs in the heavy water,
> Their soiling smoke unwrapped by the salt wind,
> Footed with snowy trampling and snowy ground.
>
> On tethers, pointing the way of the tide,
> The crusted freighters swung with their sides gushing.
>
> On evening's ship pointing northward,
> A golden sailor at sunset stood at the bow,
> As aloft in the strands a tramcar with tiny clanging
> Slowly soared over, far upward and humming still.

This is not, of course, Tennysonian verse. If anything, it is more like Matthew Arnold. The interesting thing about it, however, is its domiciling a Virgilian mood in the American scene. Whitman has shadowed the American horizon all too long, and the rhetorical tradition he founded has been petering out in a great deal of flaccid verse by minor poets with laudable opinions. It is good to see that tradition challenged in so hopeful a way.

I would not suggest for a moment that Brinnin and Fitzgerald are the only challengers of that tradition. There are other poets trying in other ways to discover new norms, some well known,

others (as a familiarity with *Poetry* [Chicago] will indicate) just beginning to appear. But these are theme for another essay.

Before I conclude, I should like to register two strong disagreements with points made in Mr Taylor's article. I think that he has been completely taken in by that talented mimic, Harry Brown. Brown has many gifts, but he is not an original poet. He is a skilful imitator of the styles of others—one can find whole patches of Yeats, Auden and others lying around in his verse—and I think that in his heart he knows it. His poetry gives, at first sight, the impression of being the real thing—it is in the modern idiom, it shows a knowledge of all the tricks of the trade, but it is basically imitative. There is not a genuine poetic insight in any of his works that I have read. I ask Mr Taylor to go over Brown's poems again carefully and try and spot the source of each verse. He will not find it difficult.

Secondly, I think Mr Taylor underestimates Karl Shapiro. I cannot see why it is a defect in Shapiro's description of Sydney Bridge that you could not tell that it was such a description if the title were blacked out. Titles of poems are integral parts of the poems and provide an important clue to how they are to be read. But I think Mr Taylor has done more than simply make one misinterpretation of a single poem. I think he has misunderstood the nature of Shapiro's verse. Shapiro, starting from that thinned rhetorical tradition against which Brinnin and Fitzgerald have rebelled, is trying to revitalize it by putting more poetic force into it. In that task it seems to me that he has been remarkably successful. He has a sensitivity to technique, for example, that poets in the rhetorical tradition rarely have. His poems in *V-Letter* show a firm and steady talent, a mastery of the fundamentals of poetic craftsmanship, and a complete lack of exhibitionism and meretriciousness. He has learned from the modern poets—there is much of the earlier Auden in his verse—but he is neither a chameleon nor a parasite: he has his own accent and he enunciates with quiet confidence. His most successful achievement is a development of the rhetorical tradition—the diagnostic poem, where insight is achieved through continuously illuminated description and emotion communicated by the precise and unexpected use of imagery and allusion (as in 'Elegy for a Dead Soldier' or 'Nigger'). The technical poise in 'Christmas Eve: Australia' is remarkable. And in 'Sunday: New Guinea' he has, at the end of the second stanza,

produced the most perfect alexandrine in modern poetry. Shapiro is certainly a poet to be reckoned with, and I consider *V-Letter* his best work so far.

TECHNIQUE AS JOY

Observations on the Poetry of E. E. Cummings

THEODORE SPENCER

I

THERE is no doubt about what Mr Cummings stands for. He has said it again and again. He is for the individual human being against mechanical regimentation, for the living Now—in flower, bird, mountain and man; he is for 'the remembrance of miracles . . . by somebody who can love and be continually reborn'. He hates standardization, communism, all planning and ordering that kill the sensuous and emotional awareness by which people are kept alive.

> my specialty is living said
> a man (who could not earn his bread
> because he would not sell his head)
>
> squads right impatiently replied
> two billion pubic lice inside
> one pair of trousers (which had died)

There is no 'squads right' for Cummings. 'Squads right' to him is the equivalent of death, of nothingness, of evil. Like Emerson, to whose tradition he essentially belongs, he thinks of evil as 'not-being'; negation. And against this not-being, which is continually being created and enforced by governments, political ideologists, race-groups and advertising agencies, Cummings waves his gay delightful banner of individual joy.

His poetic technique is a direct, almost inevitable, consequence of his point of view. The living object, the living moment, being so desirable, so much an occasion of delight, the poet's job is to capture it and describe it, or rather re-create it in permanent form,

as accurately as possible. I quote an example, one of the earliest examples, of how Cummings tries to effect this re-creation. (Poem 81 in *Collected Poems*):

l oo k—
pigeons fly ingand
whee (:are, SpRiN,k,LiNg an in-stant with sunLight
t h e n)l—
ing all go BlacK wh-eel-ing

Put into normal prose this would read more or less as follows: 'Look! pigeons, flying and wheeling, are sprinkling an instant with sunlight; then all go black, wheeling.' But to write the sentence like this obviously flattens it out, makes it less immediate. What Cummings is trying to do when he writes the passage as he does is to overcome a serious unfaithfulness to experience which is inherent in the use of language. When we use words we are in the element of Time: it takes several seconds to speak that sentence about the pigeons; one word has to come after another in chronological sequence. But the experience of *seeing* those pigeons was not involved with Time. The several things making up the experience all happened at once: the wheeling of the pigeons and their sprinkling with sunlight were simultaneous events, simultaneously perceived. Normal writing destroys that simultaneity by describing first the wheeling, and *then* the sprinkling. Unlike painting, it imposes its own falsifying temporal order on the fact.

It is this falsification of experience which Cummings, himself a painter, wants to overcome. So he splits the word 'wheeling' in half, and between the halves he puts the description of the sprinkling, and by so doing he catches the effect of 'at-once-ness' which he is after.

But this isn't all. To be as true as possible to the experience itself requires a kind of double onomatopoeia, an appeal to the eye and an appeal to the ear, so closely related that each is a part of the other. The way he prints the word 'sprinkling', half in capital letters, and with commas on either side of the 'k', greatly heightens the imitative look of the word, while in the passage as a whole the spacing between the letters, the words and the lines, the use of punctuation marks, tries to control the sound, or rather the pace, of the pigeons' movement. It is a superficial observation to say that Cummings arranges his words in a special way on the page because, as a painter, he wants to make a typographical pic-

ture; he does so for a much more interesting reason than that: because he wants to control the reading of the poem as much as he can, so that to the reader, as to the poet, there will be the smallest possible gap between the experience and its expression. Cummings' typographical irregularities are not merely a bag of tricks; they are a necessary consequence of his extreme honesty.

Sometimes, of course, he makes merely a game of his cleverness with letter arrangements, as in Poem 249, where a single 'o' has to do the work ordinarily required of several:

o pr
gress verily thou art m
mentous superc
lossal hyperpr
digious etc i kn
w & if you d
n't why g
to yonder s
called newsreel s
called theatre. . . .

But even in an experiment like this, there is satire (an emptiness of missing 'o's') beneath the gay device. And in the poems about Paul Draper (263) and Jimmy Savo (302) the typography is a remarkably accurate means of expressing the immediate impression made by their subjects. There are many other examples; though his poetry has developed considerably in recent years, he has never abandoned this particular means of capturing reality. In Poem XXVII in his most recent volume (1x1), for example, he describes a man called old Mr Lyman. There are four things to be said about him, four things which are all simultaneously present to the awareness of Cummings as Cummings meets him: there is his name, the fact that he is coming from a funeral, that he has a ruddy face and that he has blue eyes. To describe these facts one after another is to belie experience, which fuses them all into one recognition. Consequently Cummings splits up the words describing them and weaves them together; the recognition is made as unified as possible:

old mr ly
fresh from a fu
ruddy as a sun
with blue true two

man
neral
rise
eyes. . . .

These incidental rhymes only make the experiment more entertaining.

II

Cummings' most recent poetry has developed in several ways: the satire has become sharper and more epigrammatic, he has done new things with language, he has cultivated an entirely original sense of rhythm, and he has deepened his emotional subject matter. The two volumes that have appeared since *Collected Poems* of 1938, 50 *Poems* (1940) and 1 x 1 (1944), contain examples of all four of these developments, and represent, to date, the best of Cummings' work.

The satire can speak for itself:

mr u will not be missed
who as an anthologist
sold the many on the few
not excluding mr u

But the further experimenting with language is worth comment. The most striking feature of it is that different parts of speech, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and pronouns, even conjunctions, are used as nouns. This produces a double effect which is usually entirely successful (though, like most of Cummings' innovations, it is too personal to be imitated by other poets). The reader is conscious both of the word in its old use and in its new, and its new use makes it flower and come alive as it would not do if it weren't taken away from its accustomed task and given fresh duties to perform. For example, to use the verb 'am' as a noun, or to use the word 'why' to describe a woman, while it may sound foolish when so coldly referred to, accomplishes, in its context, a universality of reference which could be managed in no other way. Such words in their ordinary usage are very broad—by themselves so broad and colourless as to have almost no associations around them. But as Cummings uses them they become dynamic; they suddenly wake up:

my father moved through dooms of love
through sames of am through haves of give. . . .

For the word 'am' substitute the more normal 'being', and something vitally active (apart from the rhythm) has disappeared.

> and should some why completely weep
> my father's fingers brought her sleep:

Substitute 'girl' for 'why', and an aura of pathos vanishes.

In an age when language tends to become platitudinous and anaemic, it is a splendid thing to have a poet take the most colourless words of all—the necessary anonymous neuter robots that ordinarily do their jobs without asking for wages of recognition—and suddenly give them character and responsibility. It's as if an albino sparrow were suddenly to grow red and blue feathers, or the little switch engine in the roundhouse were shown that it could draw the Sante Fé Chief.

I quote entire the beautiful poem (No. 34 in 50 *Poems*) to the poet's father, which not only illustrates this particular device, but also illustrates, particularly at the end, Cummings' mastery of rhetorical effect. It is one of the finest lyrics America has produced.

> my father moved through dooms of love
> through sames of am through haves of give,
> singing each morning out of each night
> my father moved through depths of height
>
> this motionless forgetful where
> turned at his glance to shining here;
> that if (so timid air is firm)
> under his eyes would stir and squirm
>
> newly as from unburied which
> floats the first who, his april touch
> drove sleeping selves to swarm their fates
> woke dreamers to their ghostly roots
>
> and should some why completely weep
> my father's fingers brought her sleep:
> vainly no smallest voice might cry
> for he could feel the mountains grow.
>
> Lifting the valleys of the sea
> my father moved through griefs of joy;
> praising a forehead called the moon
> singing desire into begin

joy was his song and joy so pure
a heart of star by him could steer
and pure so now and now so yes
the wrists of twilight would rejoice

keen as midsummer's keen beyond
conceiving mind of sun will stand,
so strictly (over utmost him
so hugely) stood my father's dream

his flesh was flesh his blood was blood:
no hungry man but wished him food;
no cripple wouldn't creep one mile
uphill to only see him smile.

Scorning the pomp of must and shall
my father moved through dooms of feel;
his anger was as right as rain
his pity was as green as grain

septembering arms of year extend
less humbly wealth to foe and friend
than he to foolish and to wise
offered immeasurable is

proudly and (by octobering flame
beckoned) as earth will downward climb,
so naked for immortal work
his shoulders marched against the dark

his sorrow was as true as bread:
no liar looked him in the head;
if every friend became his foe
he'd laugh and build a world with snow.

My father moved through theys of we,
singing each new leaf out of each tree
(and every child was sure that spring
danced when she heard my father sing)

then let men kill which cannot share,
let blood and flesh be mud and mire,
scheming imagine, passion willed,
freedom a drug that's bought and sold

giving to steal and cruel kind,
a heart to fear, to doubt a mind,
to differ a disease of same,
conform the pinnacle of am

though dull were all we taste as bright,
bitter all utterly things sweet,
maggoty minus and dumb death
all we inherit, all bequeath

and nothing quite so least as truth
—i say though hate were why men breathe—
because my father lived his soul
love is the whole and more than all

The rhythmical aspects of Cummings' recent work must also be illustrated by quotation. Here again the result is delight: the poems sing and dance themselves into the memory; there is nothing like them in contemporary poetry. I quote No. 29 from 50 *Poems*:

anyone lived in a pretty how town
(with up so floating many bells down)
spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men (both little and small)
cared for anyone not at all
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
sun moon stars rain

children guessed (but only a few
and down they forgot as up they grew
autumn winter spring summer)
that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf
she laughed his joy she cried his grief
bird by snow and stir by still
anyone's any was all to her

someone married their everyones
laughed their cryings and did their dance
(sleep wake hope and then) they
said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon
(and only the snow can begin to explain
how children are apt to forget to remember
with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died i guess
(and noone stooped to kiss his face)
busy folk buried them side by side
little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep
and more by more they dream their sleep
noone and anyone earth by april
wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men (both dong and ding)
summer autumn winter spring
reaped their sowing and went their came
sun moon stars rain

III

Throughout his career Cummings has written sonnets, mostly love sonnets, in which he has tried to describe, not the visible external world, nor the flatness, the 'un-ness', which he hates, but the closeness and immediacy of emotional experience. At the beginning of his career, these sonnets, though they were printed in an unconventional way, were fairly conventional in their subject matter; they used romantic words, employed romantic images and apostrophized romantic conclusions. They seemed to be in a different, a more traditional, vein than the direct descriptions of experience illustrated by his other poems. As rhetoric, in a somewhat old-fashioned manner, these sonnets were frequently resonant with incantatory echoes, reminding their readers of the Elizabethan tradition of poetic expression. At times there was even a suspicion of an antique patina, of a deliberate antiquated cuteness, that made them slighter than they should have been, results of too obvious an artifice.

But the later sonnets, and the poem to the poet's father, do not have these failings. They have more specific gravity than the earlier poems; they ride with more authority in their cleverness; their incantation resounds from a deeper base, their rhetoric—for

they rightly depend on rhetoric—is more grand. They belong, more obviously than Cummings' other poems, to the main stream of poetry in the English language.

Cummings is obviously an individual poet: his experiments, his failures, his discoveries and his successes are examples of what an individual can do for himself. The only way he can be of use to other poets is to make them realize that they must find themselves as he found himself, in an age that makes self-finding—in life as in art—more important and more difficult than anything else. But from one point of view, a superficial one, Cummings seems out of date: in a world baked and puckered by fear, wrinkled with ridges of antagonistic barriers, he proposes gaiety and laughter, openness and delight. In some of his early poems he writes, as the romantic poets wrote, romantically about death. Death does not appear in his later work; his later emphasis excludes it; in his vision of joy and gaiety, of the deep union of one individual with another, death, except as a nightmarish mass of ectoplasmic cellophane creeping over individual reality, has no part to play. The bird, the bud, the mountain, the tree and the love of two human beings: these are what matter, They are alive, they are reality, they are what last; they are the only true subjects for poetry. It is because Cummings sees this, because he devotes with total honesty his now perfected craft to expressing what he sees, that he stands, mocking and delighted, apart from desperation and our desperate concerns, the most delightful lyric poet in America.

A LITTLE ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY

NOTE.—The following selection pretends neither to inclusiveness nor to finality as a judgement upon American poetry. The only condition put upon the poems was that they were not to have had previous English publication. Because of this condition, however, several poets whom I should like to see represented here were not included. E. E. Cummings's work was left out because of the limited space available, and because a set of seven of his poems have already been published in *Focus Four*. In addition two of his best poems are quoted in full in Theodore Spencer's article. Some of the poems printed here have never been published before; others are reprinted from recent issues of American magazines with the author's permission. The reprinting was necessary in those instances where the poet had no unpublished material available.—V. K.

GO WEST YOUNG MAN

JAMES LAUGHLIN

Yessir they're all named
either Ken or Stan or Don
every one of them and

those aren't just nick-
names either no they're
really christened like

that just Ken or Stan or
Don and you shake hands
with anybody you run into

no matter who the hell
it is and say "glad to
know you Ken glad to

know you Don" and then
two minutes later (you
may not have said ten

words to the guy) you
shake hands again and
say "glad to have met

you Stan glad to" and
they haven't heard much
about Marx and the class

struggle because they
haven't had to and by
god it makes a country

that is fit to live in
and by god I'm glad to
know you Don I'm glad!

THE HAIRS OF MY GRANDFATHER'S HEAD

JAMES LAUGHLIN

My rich old scotch
grandfather made
his money selling

lots in a cemetery
and had a pure bald
head where once in

a while a little
stiff bristle would
grow that bothered

him so much he'd
make me stand on a
stool and pull it

out with tweezers
heart, listen to me
beware this girl who

comes bearing gifts
you never even would
have dreamed of then

Grandfather's head lies
underground it shines
there like a mirror!

THE RETURN OF LOVE

JAMES LAUGHLIN

Love you that so long a
time from me have wan-

dered Love most curious
beast whose form and

shape we never see Love
most destroying and be-

loved visitor Love you
are come again you have

returned to me Love when
you came before you gave

me sorrows you brought
a girl whose mouth was

full of cinders you brought
a girl whose head time ate

away now you are come
again and bring another

you bring a girl whose
brightness floods my

blood with light you
drive me old and slow

and cold into this bright-
ness eager and yet afraid

you drive me to the light
Love you do this for

your pleasure are you a
beast of play am I your

sport or is the shape we
never see the measure of

that mysterious form the
mortal & immortal heart?

CHRISTMAS EVE UNDER HOOKER'S STATUE

From 'Lord Wherry's Castle', used here with Lowell's permission.

ROBERT LOWELL

Tonight a blackout. Twenty years ago
I hung my stocking on the tree, and hell's
Serpent entwined the apple in the toe
To sting the child with knowledge. Hooker's heels
Kicking at nothing in the shifting snow,
A cannon and a cairn of cannon balls
Rusting before the blackened Statehouse, know
How the long horn of plenty broke like glass
In Hooker's gauntlets. Once I came from Mass;

Now storm-clouds shelter Christmas, once again
Mars meets his fruitless star with open arms,
His heavy saber flashes with the rime,
The war-god's bronzed and empty forehead forms
Anonymous machinery from raw men;
The cannon on the Common cannot stun
The blundering butcher as he rides on Time—
The barrel clinks with holly. I am cold:
I ask for bread, my father gives me mould;

His stocking is full of stones. Santa in red
Is crowned with wizened berries. Man of war,
Where is the summer's garden? In its bed
The ancient speckled serpent will appear,
And black-eyed susan with her frizzled head.
When Chancellorsville mowed down the volunteer,
'All wars are boyish,' Herman Melville said;
But we are old, our fields are running wild:
Till Christ again turn wanderer and child.

IN THE CAGE

ROBERT LOWELL

The lifers file into the hall,
According to their houses—twos
Of laundered denim. On the wall
A colored fairy tinkles blues
And titters by the balustrade;
Canaries beat their bars and scream.
We come from tunnels where the spade
Pick-axe and hod for plaster steam
In mud and insulation. Here
The Bible-twisting Israelite
Fasts for his Harlem. It is night,
And it is vanity, and age
Blackens the heart of Adam. Fear,
The yellow chirper, beaks its cage.

THE DEAD IN EUROPE

ROBERT LOWELL

After the planes unloaded, we fell down
Buried together, unmarried men and women;
Not crown of thorns, not iron, not Lombard crown,
Not grilled and spindle spires pointing to heaven
Could save us. Raise us, Mother, we fell down
Here hugger-mugger in the jellied fire:
Our sacred earth in our day was our curse.

Our Mother, shall we rise on Mary's day
In Maryland, wherever corpses married
Under the rubble, bundled together? Pray
For us whom the blockbusters marred and buried;
When Satan scatters us on Rising-day,
O Mother, snatch our bodies from the fire:
Our sacred earth in our day was our curse.

Mother, my bones are trembling and I hear
The earth's reverberations and the trumpet
Bleating into my shambles. Shall I bear,
(O Mary!) unmarried man and powder-puppet,
Witness to the Devil? Mary, hear,
O Mary, marry earth, sea, air and fire;
Our sacred earth in our day is our curse.

THE SOLDIER

ROBERT LOWELL

In time of war you could not save your skin.
Where is that Ghibelline whom Dante met
On Purgatory's doorstep, without kin
To set up chantries for his God-held debt?

So far from Campaldino, no one knows
Where he is buried by the Archiano
Whose source is Camaldoli, through the snows,
Fuggendo a piedi e sanguinando il piano,
The soldier drowned face downward in his blood.
Until the thaw he waited, then the flood
Roared like a wounded dragon over shoal
And reef and snatched away his crucifix
And rolled his body like a log to Styx;
Two angels fought with bill-hooks for his soul.

WHAT MUST

First printed in *The Atlantic*, Jan. 1947. Used here with Macleish's permission.

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

I

We lay beneath the alder tree
Her breast she leaned upon my hand
The alder leaf moved over me
The sun moved over on the land
Her mouth she pressed upon my mouth
I felt the leaf beat in her breast
I felt the sun move on the year
But nearer than the leaf the sun
I felt the love go deep in me
That has no season in the earth
That has no time of spring or birth
That cannot flower like a tree
Or like one die
but only be

2

Take it up in your arms I said
Let it lie where it must
At your side on your breast
Let it rest
Love has life not of love
But of us I said
Let it lie where it must

Let it be what it is she said
Let it wait where it must

Let it be what it is she said
Let it wait as it must
It will choose soon or late
Let it wait
Love has not life of us
But of love she said
Let it lie where it must

3

Lovers who must say farewell
When the road has reached the trees
Lovers who have all to tell
Where the road runs out of sight
In the green beyond the leaves
The green cove below the light
Lovers who must say farewell
When the road has reached the trees
Touching hand to hand to speak
All their love has ever known
Find no words to speak and say
Love . . . O love . . .
and each alone
Walk together toward the trees
Where the road runs out of sight
In the green beyond the leaves
The green cove below the light

THE DARK DESCENT

Published in *The New Republic.*

NORMAN MACLEOD

The mind is like a mirror, a miracle whose light
Can drown within the image that blackens out my sight
Or stops beyond the eardrum to beat its murder in
Or drives along the fingers taking the tactual to
The terror that determines what we are and do.

Wherever the nostril nudges or mists upon the bright
Surface above the handle that held us once upright,
The taste and all our torture, the touch that brings us through
The single thought distorts us and blurs
Our will and good,
O let it all be equal
To what I might have been
Before the mind accepted the dark descent within.

A MAN IN MIDPASSAGE

Published in *New Mexico Quarterly Review Calendar* and in *Briarcliff Quarterly.* To appear in Italian translation in *Inventario* (Florence, Italy).

NORMAN MACLEOD

Is that life over
Who had covered and assuaged its central grief?
The cadres in cruel conflict
Bend the hot hallway of belief.

Out of what window should memory look:
The book in the brazier, intricate typewriter
The epitaph's instinct: which one select,
A man in the murdered frame, perhaps,

Locked in his caricature like a convict
Or strict conscience of that good
Incompletely created by any
If not blood beaten into his earth,
Tombstone tilted against evil
West of childhood, hate.

Would he walk as upright man
Once could, while adamant animals
Moved flat on the landscape
Like light over the railheads
Converge in developing thunder;

Take office, make public meaning
His poems contracted
Between airshafts

Who had first felt tamarack
Sharpen his taste
And future's handshake.

THREE HAWKS, THREE LADIES

Published in *Arizona Quarterly*.

NORMAN MACLEOD

The hawks who harry to their separate hurt
Three, leaf-folded, and slow as sleep
Moving a forest of fir the young girls,
Their laundered limbs lifted with love—

One hawk tarries that two advance
And three girls pause in their afternoon
The hawks cannot harm ever. Up all
Too soon the single future springs

Whose children laugh the bare sky
Behind the hawks on distinct levels
Their hair unravels, gold and beveled
The grave of hurt they would not have.

POSTDATE PACIFIC

Published in *Maryland Quarterly*. To be published in Italian translation in *Inventario* (Florence, Italy).

NORMAN MACLEOD

How the beautiful grey bomber
With its sting unlatched
Carries a boy with broken football face
Above an alien bird-wedge in the thin improbable air.

Not there nor anywhere in edgeless time
Float down in the South Pacific
Like a peacock under glass
Pick up the murdered remainder of his eyes
Accepting death . . .

The long years roll
Upon his imagined shore
Of childhood,
Torn
From a mountain's tooth.

THE BLUE BOMBER

NORMAN MACLEOD

The downbeat bombs invert the mind's landscape,
Artillery like involuntary batons beating the will,
Jive bombers, jitterbugs in a marathon of dive
Wherever murder and future live.

The world is full of scorn
Reserved for the poet's intellectual ardor,
The continuity of child life in one country's harbor;
The earth is large
To contain the waste where forest and mountain loom,
The broom of flaming brush like fear's fur
Sweeping the undergloom—

The grizzlies go
Into the folktales of anger, into the stiff snow
The pioneers ploughed with restricted spur
On wheels of the wind.

Now, we build with care and love
Nowhere our individual estate;
In strict apartment houses we breathe, lately
None of our own breath.

Birth fits like a knife some state project,
Our growth, grief,
Rise, reflected in mass:
Blue bomber like a reversed rake
An iron eyelash against the eye of death.

VORACITIES AND VERITIES SOMETIMES ARE INTERACTING[1]

MARIANNE MOORE

I don't like diamonds;
the emerald's "grass-lamp glow" is better;
and unobtrusiveness is dazzling,
upon occasion.
Some kinds of gratitude are trying.

[1] By permission of *Viva.*

Poets, don't make a fuss;
the elephant's "crooked trumpet" "doth write";
and to a tiger-book I am reading—
I think you know the one—
I am under obligation.

One may be pardoned, yes I know
one may, for love undying.

FROM CANTO LXXX

Printed in *Poetry*, Sept. 1946.

EZRA POUND

So it is to Mr Binyon that I owe, initially,
Mr Lewis, Mr P Wyndham Lewis. His bull-dog, me,
as it were against old Sturge M's bull-dog, Mr T. Sturge
Moore's bull-dog, et
meum est propositum, it is my intention
in tabernam, or was, to the Wiener café
you cannot yet buy one dish of Chinese food in all Italy
hence the débacle
"forloyn" said Mr Bridges (Robert)
"we'll get em' all back"
meaning archaic words and there had been a fine old fellow
named Furnivall and Dr Weir Mitchell collected

And the Franklin Inn club . . .
and young fellows go out to the colonies
but go on paying their dues
but old William was right in contending
that the crumbling of a fine house
profits no one
(Celtic or otherwise)
nor under Gesell would it happen

and Mabel's red head was a fine sight
worthy his minstrelsy
a tongue to the sea-cliffs or "Sligo in Heaven"
or his, William's, old "da" at Coney island perched on an elephant
beaming like the prophet Isaiah
  and J. Q. as it were aged 8 (Mr John Quinn)
at the target.

  "Liquids and fluids!"
  said the palmist. "A painter?
well ain't that liquids and fluids?" To the venerable J. B.
  bearded Yeats

  "a friend," sd/mr cummings, "I knew it 'cause he never tried
    to sell *me* any insurance"

(with memorial to Warren Dahler the Chris Colombus of
    Patchin)
Hier wohnt the tradition, as per Whitman in Camden
and an engraving 596 Lexington Ave.,
                24 E. 47th,
with Jim at the checquer board by the banana cage

"Funny looking wood, James, "said Aunt F.
"it looks as if it had already been burnt" [Windsor fire]
      "Part o deh roof ma'am."
      does any museum
contain one of the folding beds of that era?
And now, why? Regents Park
      where was the maison Alma-Tadema
      (with a fountain) or Leighton House
                for that matter?
and the mass of preraphaelite reliques
  in a trunk in a walled-up cellar in Selsey
"Tyke 'im up ter the bawth" (meaning Swinburne)
"Even Tennyson tried to go out
  through the fire-place."

which is what I suppose he, Fordie, wanted me to be able to
picture
when he took me to Miss Braddon's
(I mean the setting) at Richmond
But that New York I have found at Périgueix
si com' ad Arli
in wake of the sarascen
As the "Surrender of Breda" (Balasquez)
was preceded in fresco at Avignon
y cavals armatz with the perpendicular lances
and the red-headed fellow was mending his
young daughter's shoe
"Me Hercule! c'est notre comune"
(Borr," not precisely Altaforte)
with such dignity
and at Ventadour and at Aubeterre
or where they set tables down by small rivers,
and the stream's edge is lost in grass
(Uncle George cd/ not identify the place on that road
because the road had been blown off the side of the mountain
but he climbed about 200 steps of the tower
to see what he had seen thru the roof
of a barn no longer standing
su la Piave
where he had fired that howitzer
and the large eye that found him
at its level was a giraffe's eye
at dawn, in his nest, hunting leopards.

"The pose" he said "is a taxidermist's fake
the cobra is not a constrictor
and would not wrap itself around the mongoose"
But on the subject of terrapin
would not believe they cd/ fly
had the bishop brought action for libel
(I think half a million but did not, finally
take the case into court)

by which time Uncle George was computing
  Volpe's kilowatt energy
from the back of his neck as seen at the Lido Excelsior
and in that year at Florian's Sir Ronald
had said: the Negus is not a bad fellow.
  In fact the milk-white doe for his cousin
  reminding me of the Bank of Egypt
                and the gold bars
in old Menelik's palace and the mahogany counters
and desk work in the branch in, was it, Alessandria
put there by Pea (Enrico)

and wd/Whitcombe Riley be still found in a highbrow anthology

  Nancy where art thou?
Whither go all the vair and cisclatons
and the wave pattern runs in the stone
on the high parapet (Excideuil)
Mt Segur and the city of Dioce
Que tous les mois avons nouvelle lune
What the deuce has Herbiet (Christian)
  done with his painting?
Is Fritz still roaring at trieze rue Gay de Lussac
with his stone head still on the balcony?
Orage, Fordie, Crevel too quickly taken

  de mis soledades vengan

lay there till Rosetti found it remaindered
  at about two pence
(Cythera, in the moon's barge whither?
          how hast thou the crescent for car?

or did they fall because of their loose taste in music
  "Here! none of that mathematical music!"
Said the Kommandant when Münch offered Bach to the regiment
or Spewcini the all too human
      beloved in the eyetalian peninsula

for quite explicable reasons
  so that even I can now tolerate
  man sent but with the loss of criteria
and the wandering almost-tenor explained to me:
    well, the operas in the usual repertoire
have been sifted out, there's a reason

Les hommes ont je ne sais quelle peur étrange
    said Monsieur Whoosis, de la beauté

La beauté, "Beauty is difficult, Yeats" said Aubrey Beardsley
    when Yeats asked why he drew horrors
    or at least no Burne-Jones
    and Beardsley knew he was dying and had to
    make his hit quickly
    hence no more B–J in his product.

    "So very difficult, Yeats, beauty so difficult

    "I am the torch" wrote Arthur "she saith"
in the moon barge *βροδοδάκτυλος Ηώς*

with the veil of faint cloud before her
Κυθηρα δεινὰ as a leaf borne in the current
pale eyes as if without fire

all that Sandro knew, and Jacopo
      and that Velásquez never suspected
lost in the brown meat of Rembrandt
      and the raw meat of Rubens and Jordaens

"This alone, leather and bones between you and *το πᾶν*,"
                [*toh pan*, the all]
      (Chu Hsi's comment)

    or the bone *luȝ*
as the grain seed and the biceps
    books, arms, men, as with Sigismundo

and of portraits in our time Cocteau by Marie Laurencin
and Whistler's Miss Alexander
(and the three fat ladies by Sargent, adversely)
and somebody's portrait of Rodenbach
with a background
as it might be L'Ile St Louis for serenity, under Abélard's bridges
for those trees are Elysium
for serenity
under Abelard's bridges
for those trees are serenity

as he had walked under the rain altars
or under the trees of their grove
or would it be under their parpets
in his moving was stillness
as grey stone in the Aliscans
or had been at Mt Segur
and it was old Spenser who first declaimed me the Odyssey
with a head built like Bill Shephard's
on the quais of what Siracusa?
or what tennis court
near what pine trees?

care and craft in forming leagues and alliances
that avail nothing against the decree
the folly of attacking that island
and of the force *ὑπὲρ νόρον*

with a mind like that he is one of us
Favonus, vento benigno
Je suis au bout de mes forces /
That from the gates of death,
that from the gates of death: Whitman or Lovelace
found on the jo-house seat at that
in a cheap edition! [and thanks to Professor Speare]
hast'ou swum in a sea of air strip
through an aeon of nothingness,
when the raft broke and the waters went over me,

Immaculata, Introibo
for those who drink of the bitterness
Perpetua, Agatha, Anastasia
saeculorum

repos donnez a cils
  senza termine funge Immaculata Regina
    Les larmes que j'ai créés m'inondent
Tard, très tard je t'ai connue, la Tristesse,
I have been hard as youth sixty years

    if calm be after tempest
that the ants seems to wobble
    as the morning sun catches their shadows
    (Nadasky, Duett, McAllister,
    also Comfort K.P. special mention
    on sick call Penrieth, Turner, Toth hieri
    (no fortune and with a name to come)
Bankers, Seitz, Hildebrand and Cornelison
    Armstrong special mention K.P.
    White gratia Bedell gratia
    Wiseman (not William) africanus.

with a smokytorch thru the unending
      labyrinth of the souterrain
or remembering Carleton let him celebrate Christ in the grain
and if the corn cat be beaten
    Demeter has lain in my furrow
    This wind is lighter than swansdown
    the day moves not at all
    (Zupp, Bufford and Bohon)

men of no fortune and with a name to come

his helmet is used for a pisspot
this helmet is used for my footbath
    Elpenor can count the shingle under Zoagli
Pepitone was wasting toothwash
    as I lay by the drain hole
the guard's opinion is lower than that of the
    prisoners
                k. t. a.
Oh to be in England now that Winston's out
  Now that there's room for doubt
    And the bank may be the nation's

And the long years of patience
And labour's vacillations
May have let the bacon come home,
To watch how they'll slip and slide
watch how they'll try to hide
the real portent
To watch a while from the tower
where dead flies lie thick over the old charter
forgotten, oh quite forgotten
but confirming John's first one,
and still there if you climb over attic rafters;
to look at the fields; are they tilled?
is the old terrace alive as it might be
with a whole colony
if money be free again?

Chesterton's England of has-been and why-not,
or is it all rust, ruin, death duties and mortgages
and the great carriage yard empty
and more pictures gone to pay taxes

When a dog is tall but
not so tall as all that
that dog is a Talbot
(a bit long in the pasterns?)
When a butt is ½ as tall as a whole butt
That butt is a small butt
Let backe and side go bare
and the old kitchen left as the monks had left it
and the rest as time has cleft it.

[Only shadows enter my tent
as men pass between me and the sunset,]
beyond the eastern barbed wire
a sow with nine boneens
matronly as any duchess at Claridge's
and for that Christmas at Maurice Hewlett's
Going out from Southampton

they passed the car by the dozen
  who would not have shown weight on a scale
        riding, riding
          for Noel the green holly
  Noel, Noel, the green holly
  A dark night for the holly

That would have been Salisbury plain, and I have not thought of
    the Lady Anne for this twelve years
      Nor of Le Portel
How tiny the panelled room where they stabbed him
      In her lap, almost, La Stuarda
  Si tuit li dolh ehl planh el marrimen
      for the leopards and broom plants

Tudor indeed is gone and every rose
Blood-red, blanch-white that in the sunset glows
Cries: "Blood, Blood, Blood!" against the gothic stone
Of England, as the Howard or Boleyn knows.

Nor seeks the carmine petal to infer;
Nor is the white bud Time's inquisitor
Probing to know if its new-gnarled root
Twists from York's head or belly of Lancaster;

Or if a rational soul should stir, perchance,
Within the stem or summer shoot to advance
Contritions's utmost throw, seeking in thee
But oblivion, not thy forgiveness, FRANCE.

as the young lizard extends his leopard spots
  along the grass-blade seeking the green midge half an ant-size
and the Serpentine will look just the same
and the gulls be as neat on the pond
and the sunken garden unchanged
and God knows what else is left of our London
      my London, your London
and if her green elegance
  remains on this side of my rain ditch
  puss lizard will lunch on some other T-bone

sunset grand couturier.

FOR THE CHINESE ACTRESS, GARDENIA CHANG

KENNETH REXROTH

When Tu Fu was a small boy
He saw Kung Sung as she danced
With two swords, and years later
He remembered, and she lives
Still in his poem, as she lived
In his memory, always
Refining his perception,
As meditation on her
Sure grace had once taught Chang Hsü
The secret of powerful
And subtle calligraphy.
Now, days later, you are still
Clear and intact in my mind,
Your arch, small, transcendent face,
Your voice, so pure, light, and dry,
All your body's movement like
Thought in some more noble brain,
All your presence vivid as
The swords that whirled about you.
I know I shall remember
You for many, many years.
Your vision in my memory
Will teach and guide my vision,
Like the contemplation of
The deep heart of a jewel.

TO WEI PA, A RETIRED SCHOLAR

KENNETH REXROTH

The lives of many men are shorter
Than the years since we have seen each other.
Aldebaran and Antares move as we have.

And now, what night is this?
We sit here together in the candle light.
How much longer will our prime last?
Our temples are already grey.
I visit my old friends.
Half of them have become ghosts.
Fear and sorrow choke me and burn my bowels.
I never dreamed I would come this way,
After twenty years, a wayfarer to your parlor.
When we parted years ago, you were unmarried.
Now you have a row of boys and girls
Who smile and bow to their father's old friend,
And talk to me about my travels.
How have I reached this time and place?
Before I can come to the end of an endless tale
The children have set the table.
We go out in the night
And cut young onions in the rainy darkness.
We eat them with hot steaming yellow millet.
You say, "It is sad, meeting each other again,"
And drink ten toasts rapidly from the rhinocerous horn cup.
Ten cups, and still we are not drunk.
We still love each other
As we did when we were schoolboys.
Tomorrow morning mountain peaks will come between us,
And with them the endless, oblivious, business of the world.

—Tu Fu

CREDENCES OF SUMMER

WALLACE STEVENS

I

Now in midsummer come and all fools slaughtered
And spring's infuriations over and a long way
To the first autumnal inhalations, young broods
Are in the grass, the roses are heavy with a weight
Of fragrance and the mind lays by its trouble.

Now the mind lays by its trouble and considers.
The fidgets of remembrance come to this.
This is the last day of a certain year
Beyond which there is nothing left of time.
It comes to this and the imagination's life.

There is nothing more inscribed nor thought nor felt
And this must comfort the heart's core against
Its false disasters—these fathers standing round,
These mothers touching, speaking, being near,
These lovers waiting in the soft dry grass.

II

Postpone the anatomy of summer, as
The physical pine, the metaphysical pine.
Let's see the very thing and nothing else.
Let's see it with the hottest fire of sight.
Burn everything not part of it to ash.

Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky
Without evasion by a single metaphor.
Look at it in its essential barrennesss
And say this, this is the centre that I seek.
Fix it in an eternal foliage

And fill the foliage with arrested peace,
Joy of such permanence, right ignorance
Of change still possible. Exile desire
For what is not. This is the barrenness
Of the fertile thing that can attain no more.

III

It is the natural tower of all the world,
The point of survey, green's green apogee,
But a tower more precious than the view beyond,
A point of survey squatting like a throne,
Axis of everything, green's apogee

And happiest folk-land, mostly marriage-hymns.
It is the mountain on which the tower stands,
It is the final mountain. Here the sun,
Sleepless, inhales his proper air, and rests.
It is the refuge that the end creates.

It is the old man standing on the tower,
Who reads no book. His ruddy ancientness
Absorbs the ruddy summer and is appeased,
By an understanding that fulfils his age,
By a feeling capable of nothing more.

IV

One of the limits of reality
Presents itself in Oley where the hay,
Baked through long days, is piled in mows. It is
A land too ripe for enigmas, too serene.
There the distant fails the clairvoyant eye

And the secondary senses of the ear
Swarm, not with secondary sounds, but choirs,
Not evocations but last choirs, last sounds
With nothing else compounded, carried full,
Pure rhetoric of a language without words.

Things stop in that direction and since they stop
The direction stops and we accept what is
As good. The utmost must be good and is
And is our fortune and honey hived in the trees
And mingling of colours at a festival

V

One day enriches a year. One woman makes
The rest look down. One man becomes a race,
Lofty like him, like him perpetual.
Or do the other days enrich the one?
And is the queen humble as she seems to be

The charitable majesty of her whole kin?
The bristling soldier weather-foxed, who looms
In the sunshine is a filial form and one
Of the land's children, easily born, its flesh,
Not fustian. The more than casual blue

Contains the year and other years and hymns
And people without souvenir. The day
Enriches the year, not as embellishment.
Stripped of remembrance, it displays its strength—
The youth, the vital son, the heroic power.

The rock cannot be broken. It is the truth.
It rises from land and sea and covers them.
It is a mountain half way green and then,
The other immeasurable half, such rock
As placid air becomes. But it is not

A hermit's truth nor symbol in hermitage.
It is the visible rock, the audible,
The brilliant mercy of a sure repose,
On this present ground, the vividest repose,
Things certain sustaining us in certainty.

It is the rock of summer, the extreme,
A mointain luminous half-way in bloom
And then half way in the extremest light
Of sapphires flashing from the central sky,
As of twelve princes sat before a king.

VII

Far in the woods they sang their unreal songs
Secure. It was difficult to sing in face
Of the object. The singers had to avert themselves
Or else avert the object. Deep in the woods
They sang of summer in the common fields.

They sang desiring an object that was near,
In face of which desire no longer moved,
Nor made of itself that which it could not find. . . .
Three times the concentred self takes hold, three times
The trice concentred self, having possessed

The object grips it in savage scrutiny,
Once to make captive, once to subjugate
Or yield to subjugation, once to proclaim
The meaning of the capture, this hard pride,
Fully made, fully apparent, fully found.

VIII

The trumpet of morning blows in the clouds and through
The sky. It is the visible announced,
It is the more than visible, the more
Than sharp, illustrious scene. The trumpet cries
This is the successor of the invisible.

This is its substitute in stratagems
Of the spirit. This, in sight and memory,
Must take its place, as what is possible
Replaces what is not. The resounding cry
Is like ten thousand tumblers tumbling down.

To share the day. The trumpet supposes that
A mind exists, aware of division, aware
Of its cry as clarion, its diction's way
As that of a personage in a multitude:
Man's mind grown venerable in the unreal.

IX

Fly low, cock bright, and stop on a bean pole. Let
Your brown breast redden, while you wait for warmth.
With one eye watch the willow, motionless.
The gardener's cat is dead, the gardener gone
And last year's garden grows salacious weeds.

A complex of emotions falls apart,
In an abandoned spot. Soft, civil bird,
The decay that you regard: of the arranged
And of the spirit of the arranged, *douceurs*,
Tristesses, the fund of life and death, suave bush

And polished beast, this complex falls apart.
And on your bean pole, it may be, you detect
Another complex of other emotions, not
So soft, so civil, and you make a sound,
Which is not part of the listener's own sense.

X

The personae of summer play the characters
Of an inhuman author, who meditates
With the gold bugs, in blue meadows, late at night.
He does not hear his characters talk. He see
Them mottled in the moodiest costumes

Of blue and yellow, sky and sun, belted
And knotted, sashed and seamed, half pales of red,
Half pales of green, appropriate habit for
The huge decorum, the manner of the time,
Part of the mottled mood of summer's whole

In which the characters speak because they want
To speak, the fat, the roseate characters,
Free, for a moment, from malice and sudden cry,
Completed in a completed scene, speaking
Their parts as in a youthful happiness.

IMAGO

WALLACE STEVENS

Who can pick up the weight of Britain,
Who can move the German load
Or say to the French here is France again?
Imago. Imago, Imago.

It is nothing, no great thing, nor man
Of ten brilliancies of battered gold
And fortunate stone. It moves its parade
Of motions in the mind and heart,

A gorgeous fortitude. Medium man
In February hears the imagination's hymns
And sees its images, its motions
And multitudes of motions

And feels the imagination's mercies,
In a season more than sun and South wind,
Something returning from a deeper quarter,
A glacier running through delirium,

Making this heavy rock a place,
Which is not of our lives composed . . .
Lightly and lightly, O my land,
Move lightly through the air again.

CELLE QUI FÛT HÉAULMIETTE

WALLACE STEVENS

Out of the first warmth of spring,
And out of the shine of the hemlocks,
Among the bare and crooked trees,
She found a helping from the cold,

Like a meaning in nothingness,
Like the snow before it softened
And dwindled into patches,
Like a shelter not in an arc

But in a circle, not in the arc
Of winter, in the unbroken circle
Of summer, at the windy edge,
Sharp in the ice shadow of the sky,

Blue for all that and white and hard,
And yet with water running in the sun,
Entinselled and gilderlinged and gone,
Another American vulgarity.

Into that native shield she slid,
Mistress of an idea, child
Of a mother with vague, severed arms
And of a father bearded in his fire.

SAINT JOHN AND THE BACK-ACHE

WALLACE STEVENS

The Back-Ache The mind is the terriblest force in the world, father
Because, in chief, it, only, can defend
Against itself. At its mercy, we depend
Upon it.

Saint John The world is presence and not force.
Presence is not mind.

The Back-Ache Presence is *Kinder-Scenen.*

Saint John It fills the being before the mind can think.
The effect of the object is beyond the mind's
Extremest pinch and, easily, as in
A sudden color on the sea. But it is not
That big-brushed green. Or in a tragic mode,
As at the moment of the year when, tick,
Autumn howls upon half-naked summer. But
It is not the unravelling of her yellow shift.
Presence is not the woman, come upon,
Not yet accustomed, yet, at sight, humane
To most incredible depths. I speak below
The tension of the lyre. My point is that
These illustrations are neither angels, no,
Nor brilliant blows thereof, ti-rill-a-roo,
Nor all one's luck at once in a play of strings.
They help us face the dumbfoundering abyss
Between us and the object, external cause,
The little ignorance that is everything,

The possible nest in the invisible tree,
Which in a composite season, now unknown,
Denied, dismissed, may hold a serpent, loud
In our captious hymns, erect and sinuous,
Whose venom and whose wisdom will be one.
Then the stale turtle will grow limp from age.
We shall be heavy with the knowledge of that
day.

The Back-Ache It may be, maybe. It is possible.
Presence lies far too deep, for me to know
Its irrational reaction, as from pain.

TWO CONCEITS

For the Eye to Sing, if Possible

ALLEN TATE

I

Sing a song of 'sistence
Pocket full of Eye
Two billion Turtle-doves
Mourning in a sty
When the sty was opened
The Doves began to sing
Wasn't it a stylish dish
To Turtle-doves to fling

Sing a song of Agapê
Loving's in the I
Two billion M. Gide
Drinking rock-et-rye
When the rye was opened
The State began to fling
Rockets at the stratosphere
A present for the King

Sing a song of London
  Paris and Berlin
Washington and Moscow
  Where the Ids are in
When the I's were opened
  They saw ne'er a thing
But Phoenix in the Turtle
  The Turtle on the wing

Sing a song of Bethlehem
  Star of all the Idmen
Everybody's Jesus
  Now if never then
Sing Phoenix and the Turtle
  Defunctive in the sense
King Jesus eat by Turtle-dove
  In mutual flame, from hence

II

Big, inside the tub,
Rubbed hey dub-a-dub;
Little did with rub
Dub the spinning tub,
Big-little, Great-
Small; Big then ate
Little and his plate,
Small a little Great;
Little big as Big
Apple round the pig;
Apple little and trig
Inside little Big;
All inside the sky
'S voluminous eye
Whose singular surpry
Laughed a belly-sky.
So the dubbed conceit
Played nursery of cheat
To clear the eye of sleet;
Wiped Eye dripping conceit

And tipped by tubby fear
Slipped into the ear
All the I's old gear,
Semi-circled a tear
With blind sound. . . .

but Mary
Mary quite contrary
Light as a green fairy
Dances, dances. Mary.

FIVE POEMS

JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA

Much,beauty,is,less,than,the,face,of,
My,dark,hero. His,under,is,pure,
Lightning. His,under,is,the,socket,

Of,the,sun. Not,Christ,the,Fox,not,
Christ,the,Lord,His,beauty,is,too,
Sly,too,meek. But,Christ,oppositor,

Christ,foeman: The,true,dark,hero.
He,with,the,three-eyèd,thunders,he,
With,the,rigorous,terrors: this,

Man's,under,is,pure,lightning. This,
Man's,under,is,the,socket,of,the,
Sun. After,pure,eyes,have,peeled,

Off,skin,who,can,gaze,unburned? Who,
Can,stand,unbowed? Well,be,perceived,
And,well,perceive. Receive,be,received.

JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA

To see God naked and to make
His Nakedness ours: to see this
Invisible Statue and then to eke

Out of it our splendor and revolution:
Lo—mirrorless I peeled myself.
To move the pyramids from Egypt

Is easy. To move Egypt from Egypt
Is hard—to make this final
Nakedness. The heart must be

Judicial, magistral, executive:
Tear, tear!—nor fear to find
Final Nudity a nudeness of nothing.

JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA

The clock was not a clock
Not any more
It was a watch.

The watch was not a watch
Not any more
It was a clock

Both said Tick-tock
Not any more
They said Tock-tick.

Possibly because
Or because possibly
Or possibly both.

Or because impossibly
There are no laws
To time a ghost.

JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA

A,living,giant,all,in,little,pieces,
Out,of,death's,kingdom,into,shine—
My,dark,hero,out,of,death's,answers,
My,deep,hero,out,of,death's,mirrors:
My,living,brilliant,my,living,garnet.

He,dazzles,me,with,all,death's,emeralds!
He,death's,scholar,victor,flower:
All,death's,treasuries,all,death's,manuscripts,
All,death's,jewels,from,all,her,lives,
Locked,in,a,look,of,his,eyes—

He,seizeth,me,he,sizeth,me,he,driveth,me,
Out,of,my,kingdom,into,shine—
He,seizeth,me,he,driveth,me,he,raceth,me,
To,the,wild,and,gold,direction,
To,the,great,and,gold,destruction—

He,grazes,me,he,raceth,me,he,dazeth,me,
To,the,great,and,gold,answers,
To,the,bright,and,final,answers:
He,holdeth,me,he,goldeth,me,he,foldeth,me,
To,living,Primogenite,living,Garnet.

JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA

The baby that grows up from old age
Will have youth to face:
A startling time.
A difficult time.

Having been real
Reality marches to sterner reality:
A not possible with
The baby that grows up from youth.

A devilish time.
A difficult time.
When Who climbs upward
He will find his Face.

Not so the youth from youth.
He carries a faceless face
The proud imprimis
Of his general race.

But beware of the baby
Sprung of his old age!
His Face is terrible
He fronts and signifies It.

In the event of
If you understand
Look well into that Face—
Veronica wrought this Face.

A SONG FOR ROSEMARIE

JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA

Why,lamps,are,lighted,
Why,eggs,are,gold,
I,do,not,know,no,
Sweet,heavens,no.

Pale,vermouth,ultraviolet,
And,tender,lambs,astray,
But,if,these,keep,love,beautiful,
Sweet,heavens,yes.

If,they,keep,love,beautiful,
Wych-tree,wych-bird,
Any,living,whyless,do,
In,that,living,kingdom,fire,

O,in,that,living,kingdom,love,
There's,never,living,no,
All,that's,living,is,yes,
Sweet,sweet,heavens,yes.

FROM *PROUD FLESH*

ROBERT PENN WARREN

I

Chorus of Surgeons:

O, Love, sweet Love, like the world, it is every man's oyster,
Though he lounge in the drug store or punish his knees in a cloister;
Though it loll on the plate with catsup, or pulse in the deep,
Thinking only of you awake, dreaming of you asleep.
Whoever you are, wherever it is, it is yours,
And is humble, and weeps inside its little doors,
And weeps, for it guesses the truth you will never admit,
That what you are after is really its pearl, not it.
O, Love would like to be a whale and wallow in the sea
Like a big feather bed when the counterpane's kicked free,
Would like to be an elephant and stamp the jungle glade
And shake the earth like jelly with the trumpeting it made,
Or be a healthy tigress and make hideous the night
While the small neurotic monkeys hide their eyes from the sight—
But for some Love's therapeutic, for many just a bore,
And very few love Love for love, and nothing more:
Love knows a secret you will never tell,
And Aphrodite grieves upon half-shell.

Chorus Leader:

Which is simply another way of saying that the healthy and disarming candor of pure appetite is very rare.

Lucy:

I reached and plucked, and I have eaten.
And I know the moment-kissing deceit in
Which multiple bland dexterity
Eyes blink.—Then let no more
Occasion breed necessity,
For the vision lives not in surrender but labor,
Nor yet in the instancy of passionate conquest, fury's affirmer,
But in purgatorial knowledge: I would touch
With flicker of friendliness their fingers
Who peer from the interstices of the personal shadow;
Would do this, though it is not much.
In these woods there are only the late, and few, singers.

Radio:

—no doubt that Willie Stark is one of the most interesting political phenomenon in the country today. His spectacular rise to power within the last few years has been almost without precedent. He is resourceful and ruthless. His sense of political strategy has been, to date, impeccable. And he has an insatiable lust for power. Where will this lust for power lead him? That question today concerns all political observers. It is said—

(Willie Stark leaps drunkenly from the bed and tears the radio from its wires and hurls it to the floor. Then he drops across the bed, face down. After a moment the radio resumes, though disconnected.)

Radio:

But voices are gathered, and gather, and congregations of whisperers
Nod like sedge with a dry sound,
And the July-fly, the cricket, have made his heart stop, and in the summer
Noonday, blood stammer;
But not in fear, for he fears nothing as men fear,
Fears nothing not himself but fears that emptiness of self the cricket names and calls to,
Fears nothing but self, but self nothing, fears nothing therefore,
But yet fears the more,

Though the fact of the voices, the whispers, proclaims his essential success, for they follow
Success as the sea's hissing wake creams after the rudder;
Proclaims, he shall prevail.
Whence the inimical sibilance, therefore—the chuckle of rushes, windless, the cricket's dry glee?
Or do those whispers demand, what do your works of hand commemorate,
What fact the fitted stone? Commemorate only
The bubble of pride in the belly, like wind, the itch in the brain-pan,
The lonely
Name of a transient incertitude
Which had a name?
Which walked upright and had a name—
(The Chorus of Surgeons has become very agitated, whispering and gesticulating together. The Chorus Leader turns suddenly to the audience, breaking in on the radio.)

Chorus Leader:
Is there a psychiatrist in the house? Is there a psychiatrist in the house? Is there a psychiatrist in the house?

Chorus:
Well, I'd scarcely believe what I read in the papers,
And pictures before taking and after: 'Dear Sirs: I have taken
Three bottles of your Special Emulsion of Love, and find
I am much improved, and now can do my housework,
No longer experience that old pain in the chest,
Especially when fall came on, or before rain,
And I want to thank you, Sincerely yours, (Signed)
The Lonely Heart'—which is shaped like an apple, and has
A small worm at the core, and the worm has
A small tooth, familiar and hideously soft.

Chorus of Surgeons:
Hormones and chromosomes, a pocketful of rye!
Four-and-twenty blackbirds baked within a pie!
And when the pie is opened, they all begin to sing,
Now isn't that a dainty dish—
(Explosion of brasses from orchestra.)

Chorus Leader:

Not that any irreverence is intended. No, we have reverence for that marvellous and subtle mechanism, the human body. And reverence for the act of love, for I might say—without offense, I hope—that the beauty of what is termed passion is, in a sense, its own fundamental sacrament.

Chorus of Surgeons:

After the debits and debates,
After the midnight casuistry and the dry-lipped hour,
After evasion and the secret assessments of power,
That protozoic deity, which is not male or female, lifts its slow lids to smile;
Knows how to wait.
For the taxi's lurch, the whisper in the hall,
The cold latch-key and the muffled foot-fall
Conspire
To flush the maiden's cheek and make shallow the respiration;
For the hooded lamp and the last flicker of the fire
Reveal nothing familiar, though the old objects are there,
And the old identity falls away as the pin is plucked from the hair.

Chorus of Surgeons:

We do not envy them.
Not the colonel, mahogany-phiz, unswaying in saddle and grim,
Though his mount foot the roses, while the crowd's roar applauds him;
He will make work for us.

Not the capitalist, who shivers and smiles while they gawk through the glass,
And box-cars and frieghters and empires rattle like beads of a rebus;
His money goes to a Foundation.

Not the statesman, who stirs so profoundly the moral pulse of the nation,
And lingers under the bunting to define the historic mission;
He, too, is our lackey.

Colonel, capitalist, statesman, all the nameless great who glide
Under the flung flags and confetti, and are richly eyed:
They move, irridescent like scum on the disorder of the tide.
They are tangential.

But we—
We have moved among hands and the lips that move,
Have puttered among blossoms more precious than dahlias.
We are familiar to the room which is small and white;
Where all come at the twilit hour of worship.
They worship the twilit and featureless god of No-pain.
We have hung him up, in his muscular and metabolic prefection.
They long to see his face, which is featureless, white, and
shaven like an egg.

PERPETUUM MOBILE: THE CITY

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

—a dream
we dreamed
each
separately
we two

of love
and of
desire—

that fused
in the night—

in the distance
over
the meadows

by day
impossible—
The city
disppaeared
when
we arrived—

A dream
a little false
toward which
now
we stand
and stare
transfixed—

All at once
in the east
rising!

All white!

small
as a flower—

a locust cluster
a shad bush
blossoming

Over the swamps
a wild
magnolia bud
greenish
white
a northern
flower

And so
we live
looking—

At night
it wakes
On the black
sky—

a dream
toward which
we love
at night
more
than a little
false—

We have bred
we have dug
we have figured up
our costs
we have bought
an old rug—

We batter at our
unsatisfactory
brilliance—

There is no end
to desire—

Let us break
through
and go there—

in
vain

—delectable
amusement:

Milling about—

Money! in
armoured trucks—
Two men
walking
at two paces from
each other
their right hands
at the hip—
on the butt of
an automatic—

till they themselves
hold up the bank
and themselves
drive off
for themselves
the money
in an armored car—

For love!

Carefully
carefully tying
carefully

selected
whisps of long
dark hair
whisp
by whisp
upon the stubs
of his kinky wool—
For two hours
three hours
they worked—
until
he coiled
the thick
knot upon
that whorish
head—

Dragged
insensible
upon his face
by the lines—

—a running horse

For love.

Their eyes
blown out—

—for love, for love!

Neither the rain
Nor the storm
can keep them

for love!

from the daily
accomplishment
of their
appointed rounds—

Guzzling
the cream foods
while
out of sight
in
the sub-cellar—
the waste fat
the old vegetables
chucked down
a chute
the foulest
sink in the world

And go
on the out-tide
ten thousand
cots
floating to sea
like weed
that held back
the pristine ships—
and fattened there
an eel
in the water pipe—

There!

There!

There!

—a dream
of lights
hiding

the iron reason
and stone
a settled
cloud

City

whose stars
of matchless
splendor—
and
in bright-edged
clouds
the moon—

bring

silence

breathlessly—

Tearful city
on a summer's day
the hard grey
dwindling
in a wall of
rain—

farewell!

THE PINK CHURCH

Briarcliff Quarterly, Oct. 1946.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

Pink as a dawn in Galilee
whose stabbing fingers routed
Aeschylus and murder blinked . . .

—and tho' I remember little
as names go,
the thrust of that first light
was to me
as through a heart
of jade—

as chinese as you please
but not by that—remote.

Now,
the Pink Church
trembles
to the light (of dawn) again,
rigors of more
than sh'd wisely
be said at one stroke,
singing!
Covertly.
Subdued.

Sing!
transparent to the light
through which the light
shines, through the stone,
until
the stone-light glows,
pink jade
—that is the light and is
a stone
and is a church—if the image
hold. . .

as at a breath a face glows
and fades!

Come all ye aberrant,
drunks, prostitutes,
Surrealists—
Gide and—
Proust's memory (in a cork
diving suit
looking under the sea
of silence)
to bear witness:

Man is not sinful . . . unless
he sin!

—Poe, Whitman, Baudelaire
the saints
of this calendar.

Oh ladies whose beds
your
husbands defile! man, man
is the bringer
of pure delights
to you!

Who else?

And there stand
the-banded-together
in the name of
the Philosophy Dep'ts

wondering at the nature
of the stuff
poured into
the urinals
of custom . . .

O Dewey! (John)
O James! (William)
O Whitehead!
teach well!

—above and beyond
your teaching stands
the Pink Church:
the nipples of
a woman who never
bore a
child . . .

Oh what new vows shall
we swear to make all swearing
futile:
the fool
the mentally deranged
the suicide?

—suckled of its pink delight

And beyond them all whine
the slaughtered, the famished
and the lonely—
the holy church of
their minds singing madly
in tune, its stones
sibilant and roaring—

Soft voiced . . .

To which, double bass:

A torch to a heap
of new oak branches
under the tied feet of
Michael Servitus.

Be ye therefore perfect
even as your
Father in Heaven
is perfect

And all you liveried bastards,
all (tho' pardon me
all you who come
rightly under that holy
term)

Harken!

—perfect as the pink and
rounded breasts of a virgin!
Scream it in
their stupid ears—
plugged by wads of
newspulp—

Joy! Joy!
—out of Elysium!

—chanted loud as a chorus from
the Agonistes—
Milton, the unrhymer,
singing among
the rest . . .

like a Communist.

THE SEA FARER

Published in *Interim*, 1948.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

The sea will wash in
and the rocks—whether seen
by air, jagged ribs
riding the cloth of foam
or a knob or pinnacles
lined with gannets—
whose screams we may guess,
are the stubborn man.
He invites the storm, he
lives by it! instinct
with fears that are not fears
but prickles of ecstasy,
a secret liquor, a fire
that inflames his blood to
coldness so that the rocks
seem rather to leap
at the sea than the sea
to envelope them. They strain
forward to grasp ships
or even the sky itself that
bends down to be torn
upon them. To which he says,
It is I! I who am the rocks!
Without me nothing laughs.

THE SOUND OF WAVES

Published in *Interim*, 1948.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

A quatrain? Is that
the end I envision?
Rather the pace
which travel chooses.

Female? Rather the end
of giving and receiving
—of love: love surmounted
is the incentive.

Hardly. The incentive
is nothing surmounted,
the challenge lying
. . . elsewhere.

No end but among words
looking to the past,
plaintive and unschooled,
wanting a discipline

But wanting
more than discipline
a rock to blow upon
as a mist blows

or rain is driven
against some
headland jutting into
a sea—with small boats

perhaps riding under it
while the men fish
there, words blowing in
taking the shape of stone

. . .

Past that, past the image:
a voice!
out of the mist
above the waves and

the sound of waves, a
voice . speaking!

TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

from a deserted Graveyard in the Salinas Valley

Published in *Poetry*, Dec. 1946. Used with author's permission.

YVOR WINTERS

Amid appalling haze
The desert valley spreads
Up golden river beds
As if in other days.
Trees rise and thin away,
And past the trees the hills,
Pure line and shade of dust,
Bear witness to our wills:
We see them, for we must;
Deceptively they stay.

High noon returns the mind
Upon its local fact:
Dry grass and sand; we find
No vision to distract.
Low in the summer heat,
Naming old graves, are stones
Pushed here and there, the seat
Of nothing, and the bones
Beneath are similar:
Relics of lonely men,
Brutal and aimless, then
As now irregular.

These are thy fallen sons,
Thou whom I try to reach.
Thou whom perception shuns,
Thou dost elude my speech.
Yet when I go from sense
And trace thee down in thought,
I meet thee, then, intense,
And know thee as I ought.
But thou art mind alone,
And I, alas, am bound
Pure mind to flesh and bone,
And flesh and bone to ground.

These had no thought: at most
Dark faith and blinding earth.
Where is the trammeled ghost?
Was there another birth?
Only one certainty
Beside thine unfleshed eye,
Beside the spectral tree,
Can I discern: these die.
All of this stir of age,
Though it elude my sense
Into what heritage
I know not, seems to fall,
Quiet beyond recall,
Into irrelevance.

SIR GAWAINE AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

YVOR WINTERS

Reptilian green the wrinkled throat,
Green as a bough of yew the beard;
He bent his head, and so I smote;
Then for a thought my vision cleared.

The head dropped clean; he rose and walked;
He fixed his fingers in the hair;
The head was unabashed and talked;
I understood what I must dare.

His flesh, cut down, arose and grew.
He bade me wait the season's round,
And then, when he had strength anew,
To meet him on his native ground.

The year declined; and in his keep
I passed in joy a thriving yule;
And whether waking or in sleep,
I lived in riot like a fool.

He beat the woods to bring me meat.
His lady, like a forest vine,
Grew in my arms; the growth was sweet;
And yet what thoughtless force was mine!

By practise and conviction formed,
With ancient stubborness ingrained,
Although her body clung and swarmed,
My own identity remained.

Her beauty, lithe, unholy, pure
Took shapes that I had never known;
And had I once been insecure,
Had grafted laurel in my bone.

And then, since I had kept the trust,
Had loved the lady, yet was true,
The knight witheld his giant thrust
And let me go with what I knew.

I left the green bark and the shade,
Where growth was rapid, thick, and still;
I found a road that men had made
And rested on a drying hill.

AMERICAN AND ENGLISH POETRY: A QUESTIONNAIRE

THE following questionnaire was sent out to a number of American poets and critics. The replies we received are printed and analyzed below.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Is it nonsense to talk of a typical American poem? If not, what, in your opinion, are the qualities which tend to distinguish a poem as 'American'?
2. Do you consider that the language of American poetry (vocabulary, use of vocabulary, metric, cadences, syntax, punctuation) differs notably from that of English poetry? Is this difference (if any) fortuitous, or does it correspond to some underlying difference of sensibility?
3. Has American poetry been affected by those trends in English poetry in the thirties typified by the work of Auden, Spender, Day Lewis and MacNeice?
4. Has American poetry been affected by the romanticism now prevalent in English poetry, and represented in varying ways by the work of Dylan Thomas, George Barker, The New Apocalypse, Personalism, and the later poetry of Miss Edith Sitwell?

MARIANNE MOORE

1. American verse presents variety so extreme, I do not see how one can speak of 'a typical American poem'. A tendency to defy convention does seem to me typically American; but when American verse disregards rules and defies precedent and yet is poetry, it is so, surely, despite turns of speech and subject matter peculiar to this country. It is poetry because depth of experience, imagination, and 'ear', make it so; because it is stamped by firmness of personality.

2. When American poetry differs 'notably' from English poetry, in being illiterate or because the author has not read any but his

own work, I do not care to concede that the work is typically American!

3.-4. W. H. Auden's influence on American work is very marked, and general; Dylan Thomas is to some extent an influence; one encounters a modern archaism occasionally that could perhaps be attributed to Vernon Watkins; I have now and again recognized a cadence of Miss Sitwell's war poetry.

ROBERT PENN WARREN

My first impulse is to say that I don't see the 'typical American poem'—I see too many differences among the poems and the poets. As for comparison with English poetry, there has been so much give-and-take for a generation that the general schools or types, etc., don't pay much mind to the Atlantic. If I were going to try to find a difference, I think I should emphasize the greater violence in the American poetry, and I am inclined to believe that this would apply in all departments, in attitudes, vocabulary, rhythm, imagery, etc. (This is more obviously true in the field of fiction, of course.) On your third question it is certainly true that Auden, especially, has had great influence on the younger American poets, Jarrell and Shapiro, for instance, to take two of the very best. Not true, however, of R. T. S. Lowell: behind him stand Yeats and Eliot of the moderns, I suppose, and perhaps Tate. I don't see much effect at the moment of Thomas, Barker, etc.

WALLACE STEVENS

1. At bottom this question is whether there is such a thing as an American. If there is, the poems that he writes are American poems. And a typical American poem is merely a matter of choice as between one of his poems and another. It must be as easy to distinguish an American poem from a Maori poem as it is to distinguish an American from a Maori. While it is not always so easy to distinguish an American poem from an English poem, after all

would *Snow-Bound* sound quite like an English poem to you? Would you be likely to mistake *Leaves of Grass* for something English? *Snow-Bound* is a typical American poem. The poems in *Leaves of Grass* are typical American poems. Even if a difference was not to be found in anything else, it could be found in what we write about. We live in two different physical worlds and it is not nonsense to think that that matters.

2. No. At the same time, I think that there is an underlying difference of sensibility. We use the same language in pretty much the same way that you do, in print. While there are variations in vocabulary and no doubt variations in other respects, the difference, in print, is not notable.

3. My answer to this is included in my answer to 4.

4. Undoubtedly American poetry has been enriched by all of the poets mentioned in questions 3 and 4. I think that Americans find English poetry extremely to their liking. We give ourselves up to it, not at all because it is English, but because in the minute differences between it and our own poetry we find something that has a poetic value in itself.

HORACE GREGORY

1. (*a*) Not quite, but very nearly so. (*b*) I suppose most people would regard Whitman's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* as a 'typical American poem—' and it would be a case that could be very easily won. It is better to answer the refinements of this question under 2. Considering the variety of poetry that has been and is still being written in the United States, the word 'typical' becomes a trap.

2. (*a*) Without wishing to minimize or 'nationalize' the excellent qualities of their individual gifts, I would say that this question could be answered by reading certain poems of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, E. E. Cummings, Robert Frost, and Hart Crane. Of several differences, the difference in the use of language is the most obvious. (*b*) Perhaps the most important difference in 'sensibility' is that in both a cultural and historical sense those who have spent their childhood in the United States lack a

European concept of the Middle Ages. This is, I think, a profound 'difference' and one that shows its presence in a great variety of ways. It has, of course, nothing to do with the aesthetic quality of poems written on both sides of the Atlantic—unless an American poet thinks he understands the Middle Ages in the same terms that a European poet does.

3. Of course it has, but most profoundly in its own way. The one great 'difference' is that no American poet has felt the 'influence' of Rilke with the same degree of sensibility that Spender's earlier poems show.

4. 'Romanticism' in recent American poetry presents a far more continuous line than it has seemed to hold in Britain, and it has its own 'immediate ancestors' in the poems of E. A. Robinson, E. E. Cummings, and Hart Crane. It is one of the 'Romantic' illusions of the Fugitives group in the South to think of themselves as being primarily 'Classical.' I agree with Ezra Pound's remark, 'both terms are snares;' I prefer to enjoy the later poems of W. B. Yeats, Miss Edith Sitwell and Dylan Thomas without paying too much attention to group names and 'movements'. I know of no group in this country that is likely to call itself 'The New Apocalypse.'

ALLEN TATE

1. I dislike the word 'typical' in talking about poetry. But it is not difficult to distinguish an American from an English poem, because—

2. There is evidently a difference of sensibility which appears in differences of word order, of stress, of rhyme, of denotation of common objects, etc.

3. Almost every American poet who began to write after the poets named in your list has been affected by them. The 'numb-line', the limp rhythm (effective in Auden), and the anti-climax at the end of the line (inevitable in a poetry of 'social consciousness'), have become stock-in-trade in the new generation.

4. I am not aware of this influence; but it could exist without my knowing it.

JAMES LAUGHLIN

1. There definitely is a kind of poetry that is American and breaks entirely with the tradition of conventional English verse. The break is in terms of rhythm, of diction and, above all, in the conception of what a poem *is*.

2. This typical American poetry is different from English poetry simply because Americans are very different in their feeling about life. A question of environment and intellectual climate, perhaps. About all we have in common is the common language tradition.

I would give as examples of poets who have broken with England and created a purely American poetry men like William Carlos Williams, E. E. Cummings and Kenneth Patchen.

It is interesting to note that English readers can never 'get' Williams, though he is one of our greatest living writers. He is so American in sensibility that the English simply cannot understand what he is saying.

3. The Auden crowd did exercize a very great influence on many young American poets—writers such as Delmore Schwartz, Karl Shapiro, John Berryman and many others. These continue to write a poetry which is essentially English in spirit, and which has been only superficially conditioned by American living. This is not to discount its great merit as poetry.

4. The English 'new romantics' have had some influence in this country, but none of the poets whom they have affected have been much good. After all, Dylan Thomas is absolutely unique and cannot be imitated. When someone tries to do it the result is a bad parody.

I would suggest that in order to make clear to your readers what I am talking about you print entire W. C. Williams' poem *Perpetuum Mobile: The City*. This is one of the very great modern American poems, and it illustrates perfectly how Williams has developed a metric and, if you will pardon the loose phrase, a *vision* that is entirely American and very un-English.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

1. Typical is a bad word, there are only poems, one at a time. The only work that might bear the word 'typical' would, I am sure, be a mediocre one. First rate poems stand by themselves.

BUT to imagine that any work, Greek, Latin, British, Irish or American can be conceived of as *in vacuo* is idiotic. Every work created in any environment is compact of that environment in all its diverse appearances since any work of art is sensual in its nature and we can only know and present as artists what we sensually perceive, in the character in which we perceive it. Thus any art or work of art is always local and only national in its character by accident.

When a Frenchman visits the United States, as many did during the recent war, does he write like an American? Of course not. His 'locality' is still France just as most of us feel here that Auden's locality is still England. He is struggling hard, so we are told, but I for one doubt that he will ever get to the bottom of his difficulty and write an American poem. It would be too much to expect of him.

Any poem, we're talking of excellence, written in the American locale or climate, if you prefer, will have compact in it all those characteristics, psychological and otherwise, intonations, use of words, differing from British use, which make our lives here of a separate character from the British equivalent. To that extent, excellence or the lack of it being equal, one might well speak of a 'typical American poem'—reserving always what I have said above as to the use of the word 'typical'.

. . . . .

In British poetic usage there is locked the British Empire; I hope we have nothing of that here. If we do have that here then to that extent our poems would be unamerican. You have, of course, acquired T. S. Eliot from us; my own opinion of Eliot is that he was antipathetic to that which would have been required of him to be a first-rate American poet—or, rather, to write a first-rate American poem. Between Eliot and Auden lies a mountain of effort which neither for opposite reasons will climb. I have no objections; each will, I am sure, do something else, has in fact

done much else excellently—but there is much else to be done here besides.

2. My own feelings concerning the language of American poetry as it differs and might differ from standard, present-day British usage are of a basic nature. Our language is our own, it has no relation, except an accidental one, to English. We only make asses of ourselves when we teach 'English' in our schools. But that is a small matter. The important thing is to use any language tactically, sensually.

> (23 *hours later*—15 *minutes to myself—one of them used up now: the violence of my life at least serves to break up some overly devoted moods and give me a fresh start.*)

I do not wish to belabor the point of a possible relationship between a prosody and a corresponding political-social make-up but in one aspect the British social fabric and its prosody are identical, both are for us here in America useless. We get a picture of the thing, a summation, in the pathetic sonneteer, a definite psychological type that has been thoroughly catalogued and discounted. That is, naturally, an extreme type but it serves, I hope, to emphasize my point.

We need a new prosody as much as we need a new social understanding—an expanded prosody, an enormously expanded understanding of the 'metrical core of speech' as Grover I. Jacoby, Jr., editor of his free verse magazine *Variegation* (Variegation Publishing Co., 124 West 4th Street, Los Angeles 13, California) has phrased it.

The Ptolomaic System is no more antiquated to astronomy than the present prosody is to our understanding of the poem today. Not, mind you, that much of the past generally is not immutable but it has so long thwarted the imagination in the name of stability that we don't even dare to think beyond it in many cases.

I am certain that the American language offers a far more labile opportunity for a really basic opening up of the prosodic rules than does the British today. In any case we might as well go on with our investigations and observations here without paying much attention to what the British may conceivably be doing—if at all—better than we.

I myself feel that the really sweeping enlargements of opportunity in *measure*, in the making of the poem, the opening up of

the field, will come with structural changes—growing out of what began as free verse. I must quit trying to write an essay.

. . . . .

An attempt to answer your second question directly: differences in the use of vocabulary, metric, cadences, syntax, punctuation as between English and the American language are in themselves largely fortuitous. That is to say, many such differences are purely accidental and of no specific influence. However, if stability of vocabulary, use of vocabulary, cadence and so forth becomes a barrier to the development of new prosodic resources, then and to the extent that a stasis is induced by conventional practice, the trend which breaks away from that convention by discarding the old is the trend that will appeal most to the American. In that case and in that light the differences between English and American as two languages diverging from a single root are basic. Basic because it shows the nature of the two characters involved, in their differences as well as their objectives.

The measure, the measuring stick, remains in this as in all other matters under discussion here: What advances toward a new and expanded prosody are involved? If changes in vocabulary, use of vocabulary, cadences and so forth have advanced us or might advance us toward that they are important, otherwise not.

3. American poems that I read have not been affected by those trends in English poetry in the thirties typified by the work of Auden, Spender, Day Lewis and MacNeice—because such work is unrelated to the work that lies before us. We enjoy such poems as you speak of but find them completely foreign—as we found the work of Eliot foreign in its implications. Eliot's work stopped the development of American poetry for over twenty years by the tremendous popular success of its mannerisms. His influence here today is paltry though there is no one in America who does not acknowledge his skill or in fact who does not take pleasure in his successes. We have learned, however, not to be thrown off our gait by him. The same would apply to the work of the poets mentioned above.

You see, consciously or unconsciously, the American must work toward a present, a local necessity. This necessity is precisely the same as that which animated Athens, Rome or whatever other locality you may wish to name, present day London among

the rest. Each man uses what he *has* for his constructions. This promises that the *materia* of each is different from the *materia* of the other in other places and ages. Usually there is a competition for excellence in the world which—whether we like it or not—has run parallel to world dominance.

Anyhow, I see little influence of recent British poets here. We like them but we are not diverted by them from more important work.

4. No, I see no effect of the romanticism now prevalent, you say, in English poetry—here. BUT, influence or no influence, everyone who has read it is bowled over by Miss Edith Sitwell's recent work. And there you have it. Should we do anything more, after our unstinted enjoyment, than marvel at the work of this woman? And when we have done that should we not look about to see whether or not we have anything comparable in excellence to present here? And seeing our lack what more is there for us to do than to apply ourselves anew to our difficulties in order to try as we may to make of our own materials anything so successful and so fine. Much that is purely British has gone into the making of such work as Miss Sitwell has given us. What difference does it make that it is British or otherwise? It is magnificently realized, that is all that matters in the end; it arose in a certain place, out of that place—a thousand facets of English thought and history are revealed in it—but once it has caught the wind it becomes universal and thus the place has at last immortalized itself. Much else could be said of Miss Sitwell's work—as the work of a woman in particular, as of what influence the work of other women have had on her, beginning with Sappho—I think this is a subject concerning which we had better look to Homer for light.

THE HUDSON REVIEW

is America's newest major literary quarterly. Since its inception in 1948, it has published criticism, poetry, and fiction by some of the most distinguished American and European writers of our time, as well as outstanding work by talented younger persons.

THE HUDSON REVIEW announces for Spring 1950:

A special issue devoted to contributions
by and about EZRA POUND

Pound's most recent work:

THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS, *Part* I

This version of the great classical text is the first fully to communicate its power and originality to the modern reader. Part II will be published in subsequent issues.

A SELECTION OF EZRA POUND'S LETTERS

To W. H. D. Rouse concerning his translation of the *Odyssey*, and to T. S. Eliot commenting on *The Wasteland.*

THE ROSE IN THE STEEL DUST, *by Hugh Kenner*

The first adequate study of Pound's *Cantos.*

THE HUDSON REVIEW will also publish during 1950:

JAIME DE ANGULO: Indians in Overalls

CHRISTOPHER FRY: A Phoenix Too Frequent (*a verse play*)

HOWARD GRIFFIN: A Conversation with W. H. Auden

JOSEPH KERMAN: Stravinsky

SUSANNE K. LANGER: The Primary Illusions and the Great Orders of Art

CLAUDE-EDMONDE MAGNY: Sartre vs. Literature

RICHARD M. MORSE: Brazilian Modernism

DONAT O'DONNELL: The Temple of Memory: Péguy

WILLIAM TROY: The Agony of Billy Budd

PAUL VALÉRY: Notebook B 1910

The Hudson Review, P.O. Box 45, Village Station,
New York 14, N.Y.

Editors: JOSEPH BENNETT, FREDERICK MORGAN
English Editor: WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

Published quarterly in March, June, September, and December. Subscriptions in England 25/- per year; single copy, 6/6. Available through WILLIAM ARROWSMITH, THE QUEEN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD.

This book is set in 12-*pt Fournier, a letter based on the original design by Pierre Simon Fournier. Fournier was the first of many famous type-designers of the eighteenth century to cut complete families of type, large- and small-faced romans, condensed, bold, and italic series, shown in his type specimen book published in* 1742, Modèles de caractères. *The invention of the point system of type measurement is ascribed to him.*

The Monotype version used in this book is based on Fournier's medium text types, one of the narrowest book faces available today. The accompanying italic version is a graceful letter, differing in its fundamental conception from other italic types.